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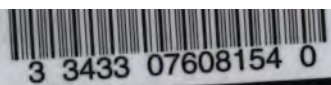
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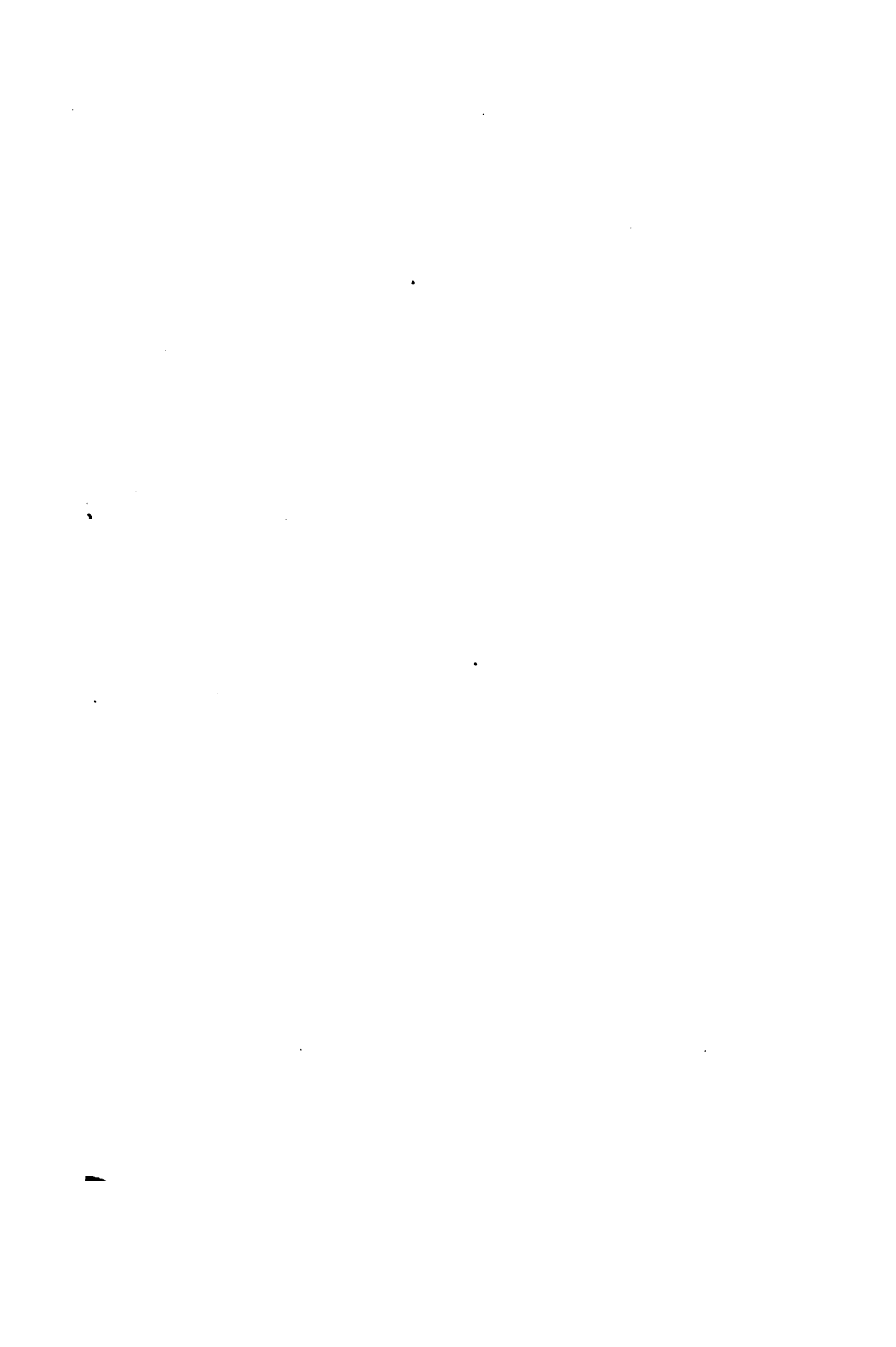


A
HUMAN
TRINITY
BY
RONALD
MACDONALD





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A HUMAN TRINITY



A HUMAN TRINITY

BY

RONALD MACDONALD

AUTHOR OF

"THE SWORD OF THE KING," "CAMILLA FAVERSHAM,"

"GOD SAVE THE KING," "THE SEA MAID"

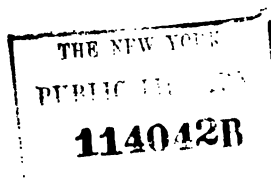
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BOOK I
THE THREE

A HUMAN TRINITY

CHAPTER I

LADY MARY FROZIER

MRS SIGISMUND CORDER sat for the painting of her portrait. The painter found her a restless sitter.

For the fifth time Lady Mary Frozier waved her subject's head leftward; and then,

"Am I keeping you too long—tiring you?" she asked, with tender but almost impersonal consideration.

"No—I'm not tired," said the other. "But I feel as if I'd been cheated—so I can't sit still."

And Mrs Corder turned face and eyes full upon the woman who was trying to fix her profile upon canvas.

Lady Mary laughed pleasantly.

"That's a very harsh criticism to make, before there's anything to show," she said.

"Oh, you can paint all right—I know that," replied Mrs Corder. "That's not what's bothering me." And then, "I didn't really come to you," she added, with a chuckle of humorous guilt, "to have my 'likeness took'."

"What did you come for?" asked Lady Mary, responding kindly to the interrogative pause, rather than moved by curiosity.

"I dare say you'll hardly believe me," said Mrs Corder, hesitating over the first words of her explanation; "but I came, Lady Mary, because I had taken a great fancy to you. You are a difficult person to know. Perhaps that is why so many people think you worth knowing."

"If they do," said Lady Mary, "that is probably the reason. Did you really think you would solve my enigma by sitting to me?"

"I hoped I might get to know you; and anyhow," said Mrs Corder, "I promised myself that I should watch your face all the time. That was to be my compensation, even if

you wouldn't be friendly. And now you've gone and put me so that I can't even see you while you work. You may complain of my fidgetting, but I complain of being cheated."

Lady Mary laughed again.

"We'll have some tea," she said, laying aside palette and brushes, and untying her apron. "This room is too bare and ugly for it, though."

And she led the way into a sunny and delicate little chamber adjoining.

"I see," she went on, when she had rung the bell and made Mrs Corder sit close to the tea-table with her back to the window, "—I see that I shall never accomplish anything till your grievance is removed."

The tea was brought. Lady Mary seated herself opposite to Mrs Corder, facing the brilliant light that poured through the window across the oblong patch of London turf and shrubs which, in the language of house-agents, is called a garden.

"There," she said, with a lightness that approached gaiety, "that is more than most women of forty would do—even in the interests of business. Look at me as much as you like."

While she drank two cups of tea, ate three slices of butter with some adherent bread, and made four commonplace remarks, Mrs Corder hardly took her eyes from the face thus offered to them; and this scrutiny Lady Mary endured with graceful good humour. As her guest drank the last of her second cup of tea, the good humour broke into a gentle smile of amusement.

"Well," she asked, "what do you think of it?"

"I simply don't believe it," said Mrs Corder.

"Believe what?" asked Lady Mary.

"Forty—it's incredible."

"That's very nice of you," said Lady Mary. "Unfortunately, it can be proved." And she stretched an interrogative hand for Mrs Corder's tea-cup.

"No—I won't have more tea. When you're ready, I am. And now that I've had a good look at you," said Mrs Corder, "I'll sit as still as a model."

They returned to the studio, and for some fifteen minutes the painter worked in silence. But she found her task difficult, and her mind unable to concentrate itself upon her work.

Her sitter began to interest Lady Mary; and Lady Mary was well aware that this interest would in the end be a good



thing for the portrait. But just now it was not of the portrait that she was thinking.

Mrs Sigismund Corder was a dark-skinned woman of three and thirty, with a face redeemed from ugliness by fine eyes, good hair and expressive mouth. Her dress suited the woman no less than it agreed with the fashion. Her pose was now perfectly free from stiffness and self-consciousness. But, if her thoughts of Lady Mary Frozier made her easy work for pencil or brush, Lady Mary's thoughts of what her picture's subject was thinking of its painter interfered seriously with the work in hand.

"One way and another," she said at last, with concessive laughter—and to Mrs Corder even this laughter had its note of restraint—"one way and another, we have pretty well taken stock of each other. I am not going to ask what you thought while you were staring me out of countenance, Mrs Corder. But there is one thing I really must know."

"I'll tell you, then," said Mrs Corder, without turning her head.

"What was it made you want to know anything more about me at all?"

"Well—partly yourself—your face—your manner—"

"Is anything wrong with my face and my manner?" asked Lady Mary.

"They're both for the world—and both perfect. If you have ever thought about it, you must know that. But each—or, rather, both have a peculiarity."

"Please tell me what it is?"

"They're veiled. Or, I think, they are a veil—your veil. Most people, whether as good and beautiful as you are, or plain and ordinary like me—most people are close to their faces. I think you live a long way off behind yours. Perhaps that is why those absurd forty years you swear to have only marked twenty-eight on the dial."

"You give me," said Lady Mary, laughing, "a most horrid mental picture of myself. I seem to see a sort of wax mask, with mouth and eyelids capable of twitching at the correct moment, and worked by electricity from a head office."

"That only shows," replied the other, "how badly I express myself. You have quite the most beautiful face I know. It's expressive and sympathetic, too. But—well—you would let all the world, perhaps, come to you, but—but I think that to none of them all do you ever go out."

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"I dare say you are right," said Lady Mary, in a voice no less gentle, yet somewhat colder than before; and then, reflectively, "Perhaps very nearly right," she added.

Mrs Sigismund Corder might, in spite of the touch of frost in her painter's voice, have pursued the subject—which was, at least in its later phase, not of her own introduction.

But interruption came; and with it for Mrs Corder a measure of enlightenment.

A bell rang with quick, divided pulsation. There was a short phrase of excuse, and with a swift turn the painter crossed the room to its door, laying down her palette as she went.

Before her back was turned Mrs Corder had caught no glimpse of Lady Mary's face. But something in the bearing of the graceful figure as it vanished convinced her that whoever had rung the bell would find that face no barrier to what was to pass between them.

And, when Lady Mary returned, followed by a young man of good figure and carriage, Mrs Corder knew that she had not read Lady Mary's back amiss. For on her face were the last tints of a dying flush, and in her eyes was the after-glow of the feeling Mrs Corder had suspected.

"I hope you are not angry with me," said Lady Mary, as she entered, pushing back a little wandering lock of hair near the left ear; and Mrs Corder noticed that, while the face of the woman paled slowly, the finger-nails and tips showed pinker than their wont against the delicate skin of cheek and forehead. "You see," she continued, "I know his ring. And I haven't seen the dear boy for three weeks." Here she laughed gaily. "But I'm forgetting. The personalities we have been exchanging, Mrs Corder, have tricked me into thinking us intimate. And of course you don't know who 'the dear boy' is."

With her right hand extended Mrs Corder stepped down from the dais.

"The personalities were mine, Lady Mary," she said. "But I am afraid they have failed in their trickery. Perhaps," she added, as the youth took her hand, "Mr Le Dane will help me, though. I do know who the 'dear boy' is, very well. But it's a long time since we met."

"Not so very long," said Mr Le Dane, smiling.

"We use different standards," replied Mrs Corder. "But

it's not very kind to remind us of it. Perhaps Sigismund and I and Elmira have fast watches and short foot-rules."

"I didn't mean to be rude—you know that," answered Le Dane. "But I've been so busy and done such a lot while I've been away that the time has passed very quickly for me. I was coming round to-night—after dinner—if I can, and if I may. Shall you be at home?"

"Of course," said Mrs Corder, heartily. "And now I'll be off. I shall be quite popular at home, bringing such news."

Anthony Le Dane preceded her down the narrow passage from the studio, crossed the wider hall and opened the front door. Mrs Corder overtook him on the steps.

"Your aunt didn't know we were friends, Anthony?" she said interrogatively, as they walked down the flagged path to her hired victoria.

"I must have spoken of you all, often enough," he replied; then added, with an after-thought: "But not lately, I think."

"Then that's why," said Mrs Corder, as she got into the carriage. "It's only since you went away that I have come to know her." Then, with a pretty wave of the hand, and a "Don't forget to-night," she drove away.

But if she had seen Anthony Le Dane leap up the steps, she would have known that it was not of after dinner that he was thinking.

CHAPTER II

ANTHONY LE DANE

LADY MARY had said that her studio was too bare and ugly to drink tea in. Yet, when Anthony opened the door again, and stood a moment at the top of the five steps that led to its floor, the dull-coloured and lofty room struck his senses as pleasanter than ever before. And than this he could give it praise no higher.

By some magic of domestic dexterity, the tea-table had been already transported from the boudoir to the painting-room; and through the doorway connecting the two a broad band of sunlight fell across the studio floor.

There, flooded for half her height only with this golden beam which made its glad inroad so fearlessly upon the clear and colder light from the high north window, stood the friend that was the first he could remember, the friend most often thought of, the friend he would surely last forget. And Anthony, before his foot touched the first downward step of the little flight, noticed, as his eyes met hers upturned, that, though only from waist to shoe-tip was she bathed in the stream of golden light, her face seemed illumined with a radiance even brighter.

He came down and seated himself near the table. Lady Mary finished the making of fresh tea, and then,

"Get off that horrid old stool," she said, "and be comfortable, dear lad."

Anthony laughed.

"If I hadn't felt at home, dear, the moment I rang the bell," he said, "I should now. Often as I have told you I like your painting-stool best, you never will believe it. And that," he added, with a sudden thought, "is because you've never found out how I came to prefer it."

Lady Mary beamed on him and poured out his tea.

"You have perched yourself there," she said, "whenever you could, since your little dangling feet wouldn't reach the second bar. And when I have tried to get you off it, you have given me, at one time and another, a hundred reasons for stick-

ing to your perch, little boy. But of course I don't know which of all those was the true reason."

"I dare say they were all true enough," replied the youth, hitching the heels of his brown boots on the lower rail of the stool, since his legs were now too long for dangling; "but this is the best and truest. I think I was nine years old before I discovered how beautiful you are. And then, by watching you, I found out you were best of all to look at when you were doing nothing; and I used to get on this stool to keep you from working. You don't often sit on it when you paint; but you didn't often paint when I perched myself here. You used to tell me stories."

While he began to drink his tea, Lady Mary crossed the room, and returned with a shabby sketch-book in her hand.

"What have you got there, aunt?" he asked. "Something new to show me?"

"No, Tony. Something old—but something you have never seen."

She opened the book, turning the leaves rapidly till she found what she wanted.

"What is it?" asked Anthony, with interest; and he noticed that her long hand made the leaves tremble a little as she turned them.

"It's only the reason why I couldn't work when you were nine years old and sat where you sit now," she answered; and gave him the book. "But I can now-a-days, you know," she added with a smile; and therewith tied her apron, picked up her brushes, and proceeded to prove her words.

Hunched, in spite of his stature, with neither discomfort nor awkwardness, upon that uncompromising stool, Anthony Le Dane sat for some minutes in silence, peering through half-closed eyelids at the drawing in the old, shabby sketch-book. And every now and again Lady Mary Frozier glanced at him sideways.

With her second glance he lifted a hand as of a man reading and fearing interruption. At this gesture, which she knew for an answer to the turning of her eyes which his had not risen to meet, her lips curved into a smile of which the sweetness was for the man that could not see it, and the bitterness for herself, that could not forget.

Anthony Le Dane had been bred in a good school for the development of the critical faculty. From very early days he had been taken to see pictures. He had seen pictures grow-

ing, as he had been used to say. He had always been allowed to say freely what he thought of the greatest or the least; and, better than all, had never been told what he ought to think, nor pressed for an opinion where he had none. An old man, who seven years before had painted his life out to his own dissatisfaction and contented starvation, had said this of the boy:—"Take that little imp Le Dane with you, and you'll enjoy even the Academy. He's a repeating pop-gun for words, now and then. But some of 'em illuminate. The worst daub ever dabbled becomes pregnant of art when Master Tony sires a criticism on it. And the little beggar finds the good thing first, however many bad ones after. If it's all good he sometimes won't speak for three minutes. If it's all bad, he goes white. Took him home on a 'bus once, and about Knightsbridge he looked as if he wanted to blubber. I said: 'Don't.' He said: 'I won't. But, oh! if there's cabbage for dinner, do get aunty to let me off. I don't like it to-day. That picture, you know, sir,' he went on, 'with the fat, white, lumpy person in the middle—it was just like boiled caterpillar in greens. It was at Bognor, and I bit it before I saw it. But I did see it.'"

This time Anthony neither turned white, nor bit caterpillar. His frown of inquiry gave place to a dark flush of pleasure. And then—where, who shall say?—in some wrinkle of eye-corner, nose-angle or mouth-curve, the fuse of memory took fire; a mist came over his eyes; the mist cleared, and he was a child again, perched on high, with his little brown shoes caught by their quarter-inch heels on the upper bar of a hard and lofty wooden stool.

At first he had been lost in wonder at the truth and beauty of a red-chalk drawing of a child, and admiration had kept memory at bay. The hands grasped the legs above the knee, each thumb dug into a fat little thigh. The body was bent forward, and the small, firm chin and the great, dark, eager eyes with the long, curved lashes of childhood, were turned upward at the very angle of passionate inquiry.

Mere crayon sketch though it was, there was in it so much of life and feeling, so much not only of the spirit of childhood, but even of the essentially human, that Anthony *read* it in its proper colours—seemed to gaze upon a finished and exquisite water-colour.

Anthony Le Dane loved children, and it was upon his tongue to call out that the picture was the personification of

interrogation—nay, the very figure of man's as well as of childhood's "Why?"; when that sensation as of a mist before his eyes came to him. And he forgot subject and object—forgot the gazer and the gazed-upon, and became absorbed, for a moment that contained in clear progression all the intervening fifteen years, into the small boy perched there (or was it *here*?) upon the stool. He knew himself for it, and it for him; and his spirit once more inhabited the little human query on its wooden altar.

He came awake, almost wondering at the tweed trousers covering the legs still hitched by the boot-heels to a bar of the stool.

"You must have loved me awfully," he said, "to do that."

Lady Mary turned her head a little further from him as she painted.

He looked again at the drawing. And then,

"I don't remember your doing it," he remarked.

"It's a sketch from memory, done one night after you had gone to bed. Nobody has ever seen it but me."

"Of course," said Anthony, "I can't tell whether it's much like what I was then. But I know it's like *me*. I knew, dear, that you could draw. I know many people think you are to be *the* portrait painter of the period—whatever that is. And yet I didn't know you could do a thing like that. If the world saw it, the world, silly though it is, would call it genius, and ask for more."

And to find more for himself he began to turn the leaves of the book. But Lady Mary, with a movement of which the gentleness concealed the rapidity, took the book from him and locked it away.

She returned to her work, but left it again to fetch from another part of the studio a carved oak box, which she set on a small table near the boy.

"That box is my present to you, Tony darling," she said softly. "Only it is to stay here, please. See," she continued, raising the lid; "five compartments—for two kinds of cigars and two of cigarettes. And look what is in the fifth."

"It's my old briar and 'baccy pouch," cried Anthony. "I've mourned them as lost for three weeks. Aunt Mary, you are a most extra special kind of duck. And, to show I'm grateful, the good old pipe shall stay here and burn its incense to your shrine alone."

Like a girl Lady Mary flushed with pleasure. Yet, if the

temple were hers, she knew it to be so only because it is the worshipper that builds.

"Thank you, dear," she replied. "I'll see that the box is never empty. Only you must try these, and see if they are what you like."

Anthony lighted a cigarette, and remarked, after the second mouthful of smoke, that she spoiled him horribly.

"Well, dear boy," she answered, "I am not averse, as you know, to incense. And some of these days there will be, if there are not already, other altars."

Anthony grunted a good-natured but inarticulate dissent.

"How about Bayswater, now?" continued Lady Mary.

"The Corders, you mean? Oh, that's not a shrine," said Anthony. "But it's certainly a very jolly household. I go there a good deal, sometimes. I should have told you a lot about them, only—well, you often don't seem much interested in my friends, Aunt Mary."

"Oh, Tony!" she cried, aghast.

"I said *seem*, dear," he explained. "It has bothered me a good deal since I left the 'Varsity. It used not to be like that, you know, and I thought I'd think about it well before I said anything. I've found out why, now."

"Have you?"

"Yes. You think I'm a man, and mustn't be frightened or bothered by inquisitiveness about my friends." Here Anthony left the stool and stood beside her. "To every one else," he went on, "I am a man, I suppose. But to you I'm still what I've always been; and I feel snubbed when you don't want to know where I've been and whom I know, and why I like or dislike this person or that."

Lady Mary went on painting, and the man that said he was still a boy laid a hand on her shoulder from behind.

"Look here," he said; and she turned to face him. "Just now you wouldn't let me look at the other things in that old sketch-book. If you know anything about me at all, you know that I haven't even asked myself what there was in it that you didn't want me to see. Please be inquisitive about my friends, and I sha'n't be a bit afraid to shut up my new book at any page I feel inclined to keep to myself."

"Thank you, Tony," she answered, with a smile coming over lips that had turned pale while he spoke. "Then tell me all about the Corders, please."

Anthony laughed with pleasure, and told her a great deal

about the Corders. After some account of the origin and progress of the friendship, and a detailed description of the household, he digressed into criticism.

"If they were nothing else," he said, "they are an international social study, you know. Most of the semi-American *ménages* one comes across are male on the English side. She is the only Englishwoman I know who has married an American. He finds himself in clover. She is always cracking up the United States, and in her heart admiring him for being all he is though he's only an American. Whereas his virtues being American and hers English make a very decently happy marriage of it. He has more to say in his own house than he ever dreamed of, and she more deference than she ever hoped for."

"And Miss Corder?" said Lady Mary. "You find her very pleasing, don't you?"

"I do indeed," the boy answered frankly. "She is quite the nicest girl I know. Perhaps that's not saying much, though, for I haven't given myself time to know many, have I?"

"And are you in love with her?"

"No," said Anthony, reflectively; "no—I don't think so."

"Are you going to be, then?" persisted the woman.

"How can I tell, dear silly aunt, till I'm in?" And then, with a slight effort, "But I must admit," he added bluntly, "it sometimes feels rather like it. It's rather interesting, you know."

"Very," said Lady Mary.

"But I should go there as much—or nearly as much," continued Anthony, "even if Corder's sister went back to America."

"Sister!" exclaimed Lady Mary. "Isn't she the daughter of this woman I'm painting?"

"She's Sigismund's sister—quite American. Why, Mrs Corder's two kids are only eight and two years old."

"Is it the children, then?" asked Lady Mary.

"It's the whole thing, dear. I've known hardly any families. We've always had a home, you and I, but two doesn't make a family."

"Doesn't it?" said the woman, speaking rather plaintively.

"Never mind the word. You know well enough what I mean," answered the boy. "I like all the Corders, and I like

seeing how neatly they all rub and tumble along together, and how little damage is done by the bumping of the corners. Sigismund's rather a caution at times; he almost talks Cockney in his desire to seem English, while his wife gives the show away by being rather proud of the idioms that are properly his. But to see the man with his kids is better than picture galleries, Aunt Mary."

And then Anthony suddenly looked at his watch.

"You're not going yet, Tony, are you?" she asked.

"I'm afraid I must," he replied. "It's another American. Swedish parents—or Norse. I met him at Leeds lately. He's a new sort to me. By way of being a gentleman—has been right through the mill of the machine-shops—and heaps more. A Harvard man, too. I'm going to bring him here soon. But I've promised to dine with him to-night at Prince's. It's partly business, dear. I'll tell you how, after you've seen him. You'll love his looks, anyhow. He's a Viking with a twang. He is huge, mighty and fair-haired."

As Lady Mary opened the front door for him—as open it she always would, in spite of locality, servants and Anthony,

"There's somebody I want much more to see than your Yankee Thor," she said.

"Who is it?" asked Anthony.

"Miss Corder," said Lady Mary.

"All right," said the boy; and whistled shrilly to a loafing hansom. The cabman and his horse awoke with a start, and jingled to the gate.

"We'll have 'em together," said Anthony. "You ask Mrs Corder to bring her sister-in-law, and I'll bring Thor to meet them."

CHAPTER III

HOW ANTHONY BEGAN TO BE SOMEBODY

ANTHONY LE DANE had no memory of father or mother. He nursed a kind of faint personal pride in the dull but honourable military and Parliamentary record of Colonel Charles Algernon Sidney Le Dane, who had died before Anthony's birth. There was a cavalry sabre and a photograph which he had cherished from earliest boyhood, with that loyalty which is often forced into the shoes of affection.

Of Lady Blanche Le Dane there was, in addition to several chalk and water-colour sketches, a picture in oils—the work of her sister, Lady Mary Frozier. And Anthony could not have told how often in the past he had tried to awaken in his own heart some touch of filial sentiment in gazing at this picture of the mother he could not remember. But all the breadth of conception, delicacy of treatment, and sisterly insight which Lady Mary had used in producing that excellent portrait had been wholly without power of appeal to Anthony.

"It doesn't look," he had once murmured, half aloud, "like anybody's mother."

Lady Mary was by, and had asked him what he said; but the boy, in fear of giving pain to his aunt, had refused to repeat his criticism upon the blonde, stern and handsome face that stared down at him from the wall of the sunny boudoir; and among the few things in her idol's character and habits which to Lady Mary remained for years unaccounted for, was Anthony's obstinate distaste for her little private sitting-room.

Now, in his twenty-fourth year, Anthony had put aside any regrets which such thoughts may have caused him in the past. The excitement of the present and the charm of the future filled him. For Anthony Le Dane had taken hold of his life with both hands.

At seventeen he had matriculated at Trinity; in his Tripos three years later had come out second Wrangler; had thereupon decided that Cambridge had given him all he asked of her; renounced the tepid Paradise of the Common Room, and

came to London and Cheyne Walk overflowing with schemes for his future life and the disposal of his modest fortune.

Now Lady Mary Frozier, if she knew little of business, was not without knowledge of the world; and she was more pleased than she was surprised in discovering the sound common sense that tempered the sanguine cast of Anthony's hopes and plans. In the three years which elapsed between his leaving the University and the day upon which he interrupted Mrs Corder's sitting, Lady Mary was to discover that Anthony's optimism was founded, not upon temperamental belief in his own luck, but upon characteristic confidence in his own ability, and reliance even stronger upon his own judgment.

Once, in a time of perplexity, she told him that something would surely turn up.

"Great Shade of Micawber!" he answered, laughing. "Things, my pretty aunt, are like potatoes. You've got to get a spade and turn them up yourself."

But at first Lady Mary had tried to dissuade him from the life of industrial activity he was designing for himself.

"But why all this haste, Anthony?" she had asked, not a little alarmed by his energy. "There's plenty of time, and you have plenty of money to live comfortably."

"There's never plenty of time, dear," he had answered, "not for the individual, at least. The world seems to me a jolly fine place, and I mean to squeeze out of it, and to get into my little lease of it all I can. As for money—oh! yes, I have plenty—but not nearly enough."

So Lady Mary began to tell him of five hundred a year that she could so easily let him have in addition to his own income; he knew, did he not? how much better her pictures were selling, and—

But Anthony interrupted.

"Of course you would, bless you," he cried. "You'd take the rings off those beautiful long fingers and the dress off your back to coddle me a little deeper in luxury. But you don't understand. It isn't luxury I'm after. I'm going to be somebody, so I must do things. I'm giving myself twenty-five years to do 'em in. At the end of that time I ought to be known and I ought to be rolling in money. The rest of the time I'm going to fill in by using the name and the plunder in a way of my own."

"Tell me how, Tony," she implored, glowing already with

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pride of his cloudy exploits. "I'm sure it's philanthropy in some shape or other."

Anthony grinned uncomfortably.

"That's a beastly word, Aunt Mary," he grunted. "No. I shall keep that part to myself for the present. You see," he added, "it might never come off."

"From you, that is a great admission," said Lady Mary.

"It is," replied the boy, gravely. "But the detail isn't worked out yet, and of course there are points in which twenty-five years may modify my views. So I'll keep my own counsel and my liberty. But there's plenty to talk about, dear, in the first part of the plan."

Lady Mary found that there was. For a while she thought that her advice was being asked as to choice of a career; and she had suggested everything she could think of from book-publishing to diplomacy before she became aware that this business-like enthusiast had had his mind already made up before he had opened his lips to her.

At the end of five years, he told her, he would know all that could be known by one man about practical engineering in all its branches.

When Lady Mary objected that five years would hardly give him knowledge that must cost most years of many men's lives to acquire, he explained very carefully that he had not said all that many knew about each, but all that one could know about many.

"And this, of course, is my own country, isn't it, Aunt Mary?" he added, blowing the smoke of his cigarette possessively to the four corners of her studio. And she answered him with a smile. "Well," he continued, "if I can't be a prophet, there's no reason why you shouldn't understand that I'm a little tin genius at mathematics. I can't tell the others, you know, but I can tell you why it was that I didn't beat Braybrook in the Tripos."

"Surely you know you can tell me anything?" she said, not without a shade of reproach in her voice.

"I'd had all this in my head for two years, and for two years at least I have been working for another and much harder school than the Tripos," explained Anthony. "My tutor knew it, and wasn't he wild? The glory of being Senior Wrangler was all he could think of."

"I wish you had been a good boy and done what he told you," moaned Lady Mary.

"I did," said Anthony. "Also I did all the book-work of the new engineering Tripos. And he found it out. Well, all that's over."

And he went on to tell her that, during the five years in which he was to learn so much, he intended living upon five hundred a year and saving fifteen hundred. And when he had gathered his knowledge, he would put all his savings, plus his capital, into a business; either an old-established firm, or, which he would much prefer, into a new concern which should open its career without handicap of obsolescent plant and obsolete methods. But this, he said, would depend on his finding, during those years, the man he was looking for; and finding him, moreover, in possession of capital.

All these things had Anthony said while bump-races and lectures were still fresh in his habit of thought. And now, though but little advanced into his twenty-fourth year, he was known already in the shops and designing-rooms of more firms all over England than he could readily have counted. A little influence had got him into the first, and in each he left no less favour behind him than he carried to the next.

The mathematical ability which had at Cambridge shown itself as academic talent, had since shone out as practical genius. In the three years he had refused five several offers of partnership; but in three cases at least the offer had been due even more to the promise of commercial ability which the proposer had divined in Anthony's character than to the inventive and executive skill which was patent in his mechanical performance.

CHAPTER IV

INGESTOW

SO already Anthony Le Dane began to be somebody. Of this, however, he had himself little, if any, knowledge. But his hands were full of work, and his head of projects; and he thought well of the world, and by no means ill of Anthony Le Dane.

This evening, as he swung along in his cab, he was expecting to enjoy himself. After the hard work in unpleasant surroundings which had filled his time during his latest absence from London, an evening in town, to be spent with a man who was certainly a pleasant companion, and might turn out to be something much harder to find, was not without attraction.

Axel Forsberg, already dressed for dinner, was waiting in the little parlour of Anthony's flat. To an ordinary visitor this flat would have seemed of a smallness almost ridiculous, until he had discovered that its best room was kept locked against all the world but Anthony. His workshop, as he called it, apart, the accommodation consisted of a small bedroom, a smaller parlour, and a kitchen that was smallest of all. The flat was high up in a huge block, and was reached from a narrow street running out of Shaftesbury Avenue.

While he dressed for dinner, Anthony left open the door between the two rooms. His friend lay back in a big chair and smoked, waiting for conversation. When the splash of the hasty cold bath was over, he began it.

"Queer little den you have up here, Le Dane," he said, as if asking explanation.

"It suits me," said Anthony, in a voice broken by the energy with which he was using his towel. "What's wrong with it?"

Forsberg laughed.

"You're such—such a swell, Le Dane," he explained, "that I expected something more swagger."

"Two years ago I had rooms in St James's. I'm sorry for your sake that I moved," replied Anthony, in a voice muffled by the shirt he was pulling over his head. "But I'm jolly glad for my own, seeing I save a hundred and fifty a year

by the change. And I should like to know, Forsberg," he went on, coming to the door, and standing there to fasten his collar while he talked, "what right you had to expect marble halls and downy ease of me. You know me simply as an engineer."

But Axel Forsberg either could not or would not explain. Like all clever Americans, especially such as are young and have been fostered intellectually in the newer Cambridge, he knew a great deal. But in one thing he was unlike the majority of his contemporaries; he knew his own limitations. He had conceived a great liking for Anthony Le Dane, whose capable mind, pleasant disposition, and manners which were at once simpler and more refined than any he had yet encountered on either side of the Atlantic, formed a compound which the Scandinavian American found increasingly interesting to study. When he had first met him, he had classed Anthony as belonging to what he was pleased to call "the upper ten." And although he had known Anthony barely three weeks, he already knew him too well to display curiosity in a matter upon which information had never been offered.

"Unless I'm working at something of my own," Anthony continued, "I don't use the place much, except to sleep and breakfast in. I've been out of London lately, more than in it, and when I am in town I put in most of my time with— with my people. Then I have two clubs," he added; "but I'm not going to give you dinner at either of them to-night. One of them is stuffy, and the cooking's pretty rotten at the other. Besides, I feel like a boy home from school, or a freshman in town for the Boat Race. Shall it be Prince's, or the Trocadero, or where?"

"You know best, up to date," said Forsberg, slowly raising his great person from the long chair. "But I shall know best very soon."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Anthony, taking up his hat. "Good Heavens, man, what a size you are! This little place is half full of you. Come along. Yes," he added, as they went down the stone stairs, "you'll get the best for your face and your accent. And you'll get plenty for the mere size of your carcase."

"That's all right," said Forsberg. "I'm hungry to-night, and, like you, Le Dane, I feel a little bit on the razzle-dazzle."

Neither of the men, however, had the youth nor the audacity of the words in which he had expressed his holiday

humour. No smallest portion of the town did they that evening paint red. Their dinner, indeed, proved the best part of the entertainment they had promised themselves. For the end of the first act of a musical comedy found them pensively smoking cigarettes on the steps in front of the theatre.

"It's not so hot out here," said Anthony.

"And much livelier, to me, anyway," agreed Forsberg. "If you've had enough of that fooling, Le Dane, I'd like to have you take me a walk. London's new to me."

In Piccadilly the closeness of the air was relieved by a breeze, and they walked steadily westward for the pleasure of meeting it.

Suddenly, beneath a lamp-post, Anthony looked at his watch.

"I clean forgot," he exclaimed.

"Forgot what?" asked his friend.

"That I half promised to go and see some friends in Bayswater after dinner," replied Anthony. "It's half-past ten—hardly too late. They're nice people, Forsberg—Americans. Will you come?"

Forsberg thought there were plenty of these at home. He began, indeed, to say as much, when,

"Miss Corder is a very pretty girl," said Anthony; and, as he spoke, his friend took two long, quick strides ahead. Anthony's eye was caught by the figure in front of him—colossal, alert, distinguished and well proportioned. He did not regret his invitation; but pondered, with placid rapidity of thought, whether generosity should have the credit of it, or lukewarmness the blame.

Axel Forsberg, however, was not to meet Elmira Corder that evening. He had not quickened his pace for nothing. A damsel in distress might have aroused his chivalry; but a motor-car in panting, motionless disorder would excite at once the whole force of his professional zeal.

Separated from the Green Park railings only by the flagstones of the foot-path where it begins to bend southward, stood a large, brilliantly shining, complicated car. Its seats were empty, and beside it, disconsolately smoking a cigarette, stood a good-looking man of about seven and twenty. He watched his wayward plaything with a moody helplessness which removed any hesitation Forsberg might have otherwise felt in addressing him.

"Something wrong?" he asked, with curt civility.

"Yes," said the other, without moving his eyes from the car.

"What is it?"

"I wish you'd tell me that," replied the owner, pushing his hat half an inch backward, as if it oppressed him. "I've only had her two days, and she's Greek to me."

"You'd better let me try and start her up, then," said Forsberg. "There's very little I don't know about automobiles."

"I shall be much obliged," began the stranger; and then, as Forsberg would have mounted to the driving-seat, he laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait a moment," he said. "We mustn't kill my man, though I fancy it'd serve him about right. He's under the car, pretending to do something; but I believe he's asleep. I ordered the car unexpectedly this evening. The man seemed rather queer when we started. I put it down to the hurry. But it wasn't long before I was glad the streets were fairly empty. I was better pleased still when he said something was wrong, and stopped here."

The invisible *chauffeur* did not respond when called by name. Axel Forsberg, who held that the trade had no worse enemy than an irresponsible driver, was angry, and with some violence dragged him by the left ankle from beneath the body of the car.

The inevitable crowd began to gather, the necessary policeman being fortunately among the first. The culprit sat up in the road, all his efforts to rub the sleep from his eyes failing to clear the liquor from his brain.

The policeman was in favour of extreme measures. But the drunken man's master objected.

"Don't run him in, constable," he said. "I'll talk to him sober first. Then we'll see."

So the *chauffeur* was sent home in a cab, while the policeman with graceful secrecy pouched half-a-crown. He was preparing to stand guard over the motor until expert aid should arrive. But Axel Forsberg mounted to the driving-seat, and soon discovered the machine to be in perfect order.

"That man of yours," he said to the owner, "was afraid of himself, not the machine."

He ran the motor into the road and brought it back to the starting-place in a very graceful and accurate curve.

"I'll drive her home for you, with pleasure," he said, as the car came to a stand.

The tipsy driver gone, and the motor being evidently undamaged, the crowd had lost interest, and of it Anthony Le Dane was all that remained.

"That's very good of you," said the owner, and got up beside Forsberg. Then, seeing Anthony, and being under a vague impression that the two men had arrived together, he added: "But your friend?"

Anthony replied that he had a call to make, and would take a hansom. Whereupon the other, wondering why Anthony had smiled as if with amusement as he spoke, insisted on taking him to his destination. So Anthony got up behind, and gave his friend initial directions for reaching Ladbroke Square.

"You'll excuse my not asking you to sit in front," said the stranger, turning round to Anthony. "The fact is, your friend seems so accomplished a driver that I'm hoping to learn something. This particular machine is new to me, and I came out to-night meaning to learn its pretty little ways and habits from my man. I had to do it, because I'm booked to take a party down into the New Forest to-morrow. I had meant to run down to Bagshot or so to-night. But I don't care to do it alone."

"I'll take you," said Forsberg. "And, if you mind what I tell you, you'll drive her back as neatly as I shall drive her down."

When the other would have objected to giving him so much trouble,

"I like the car," Forsberg explained, "and I daresay we sha'n't get on badly for an hour or two."

"Then we'd better have a three-cornered introduction," said his host.

"Who's to begin?" asked Forsberg. Then to Anthony, over his shoulder, "I think it's up to you, Le Dane," he said. "It's time you did something useful."

"Very well," replied Anthony. "Lord Ingestow, let me introduce to you Mr Axel Forsberg. Forsberg, this is my uncle, Lord Ingestow."

If the American was a little surprised as well as not displeased in learning the rank of the man he had befriended, Lord Ingestow was no less astonished by the claim to kinship.

"Uncle!" he exclaimed, with less than his habitual courtesy.

"I think," said Anthony, "that Mr Forsberg mentioned my name."

"Did he? Eh, what?" cried Lord Ingestow; and the

light of a brilliant street-lamp falling upon his honest face revealed a dawning smile of memory. "Of course he did. Le Dane, he said. But, 'pon my word, it never struck me. Then you must be my sister Mary's—no—beg pardon—I mean, Blanche's son. Not my fault, you know," he went on, lowering his voice, "that your mother and mine never could hit it off. How is Lady Blanche?"

"I have no recent news," said Anthony. "She died when I was two years old."

"Of course. What a fool I am! I was in bibs and embroidered drawers then myself, so of course I forgot. But the Colonel—how does he stand the racket?"

Anthony could not restrain a short laugh, though he felt it unkind.

"My dear uncle—" he began.

But Ingestow cut him short.

"Oh, damn uncles!" he cried. "There's precious little difference in our ages. How is he?"

"My father," said Anthony, "died eight months before I was born."

"Oh, Lord!" said Ingestow, "I'm making an ass of myself."

And he twisted himself further round, and looked as intently as the shifting lights allowed in Anthony's face.

"But I do remember something. Yes, I know. You came to Harrow when I was in the lower fifth—and you were a 'swot.' And I visited you in South Kensington, or Fulham, or somewhere near the river. And that's why I muffed it all. There was a studio, and pictures, and I've always associated you with sister Mary ever since, and that's why I've said all those foolish things. I hope you'll overlook them."

"I sha'n't want to overlook anything that associates me with Lady Mary," replied Anthony, pleasantly.

"I can understand that," said Ingestow, "though I don't remember seeing her more than three times in my life." Then he laughed. "I got into a regular earthquake of a row that time, when they found out at home that I'd been with you to see her."

"I never understood what the trouble was all about," said Anthony.

"It was Blanche and Lady Ingestow—your mother and mine," said the uncle. "Mine, you see, was not so old as yours, and tried to play the stepmamma. It was a sort of

schoolgirl quarrel at first, into which they managed to drag first politics, then social standards, and finally religion—until they had dignified the squabble into an exalted and life-long hatred."

"But Lady Mary—?" began Anthony.

"Oh, Blanche went and died, you see, before the mater had done with her. She had still a good bit left up her sleeve. Sister Lady Mary had always lived with her—with your mother, I mean. There was nobody else, so it had to be worked off on the younger sister."

"Is it?" asked Anthony, not a little amused by the frankness of this youthful uncle.

"Is it what? Oh, you mean, is it worked off? Not much," said Lord Ingestow, with emphasis. "You see, they never meet, so there's been little opportunity. If your good aunt hadn't suddenly become famous with her pictures, there'd have been none at all. She's a rattling good sort in most ways, the mater, but she's quite unable to keep her tongue off anything that reminds her, even remotely, of Lady Blanche."

This conversation, conducted by the elder man in a tone subdued not below the point of respect to his charioteer, yet fondly imagined inaudible to a man whose attention was engaged by a road and an engine both unfamiliar, was here interrupted by the car's coming to a standstill.

"What's up?" asked Ingestow.

They were close to Kensington Church.

"The route, I guess," said Forsberg, glancing to his right up Church Street. "Anyway, I'm not going further west till you give the word. It's very little I know of this splay-footed hub, but I know it won't take us long now to overshoot Bayswater."

Anthony told him to turn to the right, and the motor glided with disdainful ease up the hill.

"If you hadn't asked," he said, "I should have let you come too far. But how on earth, Forsberg, could you know it? Didn't you tell me you'd never been in London till this afternoon?"

"Now-a-days," said Forsberg, neatly avoiding the ragged postilion and the third horse of a struggling green omnibus, "—now-a-days you don't have to send out two men with a long pole to bring back impossible bunches of grapes, like old Joshua. You buy a map for sixpence. It's bad, but better than the clustered water-melons."

Two minutes later, when they were near his destination, Anthony asked a question.

"But I can't see, Lord Ingestow," he said, "why you shouldn't have been to see your sister since."

"Since I've been on my own, you mean? Well, of course I ought. I know I'm a lazy devil—busy, but damned lazy to do anything new. But I give you my word, Le Dane, I would have been to see her. I was slowly worrying my conscience to the point of action—or my conscience me, which is it?—when she blazed on the world with that picture. Lady Ingestow spat and swore like a white pussy. And then I—I was ashamed."

"Afraid the picture'd get the credit?" asked the elderly nephew.

"No—only that the brother might get sunk in the snob," said the juvenile uncle.

And then they set Anthony down in front of the Corders' house.

From the pavement he reached up his hand to Ingestow.

"I'm awfully glad we met," said Ingestow, as he took it.

"So am I," answered Anthony. "And I wish you'd let me give you half-a-crown."

Lord Ingestow laughed, with puzzled half-recollection.

"I was Bielby's fag, you know," explained Anthony.

"You came to his study and found me cleaning his dancing-pumps. You found out, too, from that fat beast, that I was your nephew, and insisted on tipping me five shillings."

Ladbroke Square echoed Ingestow's laugh.

"I remember," he cried. "And I'd only half-a-crown, and I made Bielby lend me the other one."

"That's it," said Anthony. "I wanted to give them back to you afterwards. But I didn't dare. The whole house knew you were always stony, and I had always more than I wanted."

Before this Anthony had rung the bell, and the door was now open.

"Well," said Ingestow, "I'll come to you for the five bob and more, when I want it. And if you'll smooth the way, I'll come next week and pay my respects to sister Lady Mary."

So, with a word to Forsberg, Anthony went into the house.

And the great car swept round and slid away in quest of the Southampton Road.

CHAPTER V

ELMIRA

MISS ELMIRA CORDER was undoubtedly a beautiful girl. Some even of her friends admitted as much. With her clear-cut features, graceful figure, and complete knowledge of the art of dressing at least her own charming person, she appeared to the best advantage standing and in profile. She had been standing near the open window while Anthony Le Dane said those few parting words to Lord Ingestow. But she rose from a chair at the other side of the room as Anthony entered it. She rose with dignity, laying down the book she had not been reading.

So much more pleasing, standing thus, did she appear than even Anthony's expectation, that he experienced a sensation of vivid self-satisfaction.

"I must certainly be in love," he thought. Like many another, Anthony supposed that state to be a clearly definable and invariable condition of the emotions.

"I'm awfully late," he said, as he took her hand.

"Harriet told us you were coming," said the girl, sinking into her seat again. "Sigismund was cross because he had to be out late, and I put on my best frock to do you honour. So I might be cross too."

"Don't be," said Anthony. "I only said perhaps, and I forgot an engagement. It's rather funny, how I came to get here at all."

Miss Corder expressed the necessary curiosity, and Anthony narrated the adventure of the motor-car.

"I was going to ask you if you had set up an automobile," said the girl. "Your uncle! And you say he's quite young?"

"I should think he looks as young at least as I do," replied Anthony. "He's really three or four years older."

And then Elmira must know whether the dowager Lady Ingestow had other children; indeed, before her curiosity was satisfied, she had put Anthony through a catechism on his family history that was a little more precise than altogether pleased him. Yet the questions were asked, he told himself, in a spirit so simple and friendly, that he had only himself to

blame for the shade of annoyance they caused him. He should have been, he felt, either less reticent in the past, or less communicative this evening. For it was a peculiarity of Anthony's that he hated talking of his family. He would himself have been puzzled to account for this distaste; of which the explanation, perhaps, is to be found in a certain unwillingness to let others into the secret of how little he knew or cared for the parents he could not remember, and of how completely he had transferred to Lady Mary Frozier his wealth of filial affection.

"Why, then," exclaimed Elmira at last, "if your baby-uncle should get spilt to-night by your scientific *chauffeur* from way down home, Mr Le Dane, you'd be Lord Ingestow to-morrow?"

"To-night, I should think," said Anthony; and somehow Elmira did not like the way in which he said it. "That is," he added, "if there is succession through the female. I'm afraid I'm quite ignorant about that."

On this subject Miss Corder did not ask any more questions. But questions she must ask, and she had the skill with her next to please what she made no doubt was Anthony's vanity.

"You haven't told me a word about Leeds," she said, with reproach so engaging and *bonhomie* so delicate that he never paused to reflect that for such information no time had been given him; "and you know that I've been real anxious about that auto—that motor-car."

Anthony had told her something of his affairs—how little, she did not guess.

"It wasn't an auto-motor-car," he replied, "that I went out to see."

"Oh, Anthony!" she expostulated. "And you told me—"

"That I went to see a man—a factory—where they're turning out a new storage-battery."

"Well," said the girl, "that's for cars, isn't it?"

"Not for mine—not for what I shall make, if I ever make one. It would have been for the world, if it had been all it was cracked up to be; and I should have been the lucky early bird to take it to the hungry little world in its nest."

"Wasn't the worm any good, then?" asked Elmira; and the keenness of her inquiry struck him with the inevitable flattery of interest in his interests.

"It wasn't fat enough for me, anyhow," he answered. Then he looked at her for a moment with inquisition almost ruthless, under which the lids fell over her eyes. "I say," he went on, speaking very boyishly, "I wonder whether you really do care to hear about all these things that my mind is so full of."

"The things," she replied, "are generally interesting in themselves. But if they weren't," she went on, raising her head and eyelids, and looking him in the face with eyes so bright that they seemed upon the point of dimming their vision with tears, "—if they weren't, there is a thing that would make them so."

Anthony forgot accumulators and, for the moment, everything in the world but those eyes where the tears seemed gathering. But he could not find the way to make her tell him what that one thing was which made his affairs of interest to her. It is possible that he would have attempted to force her hand, but this too she prevented.

"No, no," she cried, shaking her head, "I won't tell. It's my secret—rather a nice one. And it won't be my secret any more, when it's told. But I'd dearly like to have you tell me some more about that worm that wasn't worm enough. I mean, I want to know why storage-batteries are so important—so important to you."

So Anthony relaxed his hold upon the pretty, slender fingers which he suddenly became aware he was holding; and the fingers returned with a smooth and hardly disturbing glide to their owner's control. And then he told her, as she thought, all that there was to tell. He did but tell her, in truth, a small part of the schemes that filled his mind. For his talk was of an enterprise whose greatness seemed to vary in a ratio inverse to the greatness of the "if" that supported it.

"It's like this, you see," he said in conclusion. "The scheme is cut and dried. The money's ready. The streets of not London only, but the kingdom—other kingdoms, States and Empires, will be filled with a type of horseless carriage cheaper, safer, more easily handled, as well as capable of longer distances without re-charging, than anything that has been attempted yet. No odour—nearly noiseless. Such vehicles are bound to come. It sounds almost ridiculous to tell you that I have the designs of most of the known applications of motor-traction already worked out—many in models; that I hold a score of subsidiary patents that will be used in the

different types; that I know how and where and under whom the whole thing will begin, if it ever begins at all; and that I have taken all this trouble for a dream."

Whatever it may have been before, Elmira's interest was now genuine and cordial.

"Why a dream?" she cried. "You say it is bound to come."

"Of course it is," said Anthony. "But it won't come through me, unless the new storage-battery is found jolly soon. Edison ought to have found it, but he hasn't. If he does, you know, the game won't come my way."

"But the designs—the subsidiary patents—" began Elmira.

"Well?" asked Anthony.

"Surely they ought not to be held back. There might be money in those alone."

"Plenty for the small fry," he answered. "But I'm in a hurry."

Elmira's eyes flashed.

"I guess I know what you mean," she said, with a brilliant smile. "You've too much under your lid to waste time playing step-ladder to the future."

Anthony was no less gratified by her comprehension than by her enthusiasm. When he had told her this and other things,

"But tell me," said Elmira, "why you are in such a hurry."

"To be rich," said Anthony.

"Why? What for?" asked the girl.

"That secret," replied the man, with a reminiscence, "wouldn't be mine any longer if I told it." And he was young enough not to know that the girl put upon his words the interpretation she had wished him to give to her own.

She liked Anthony. She had for him, perhaps, a feeling stronger than liking—certainly a stronger liking than she had felt for any other man. But, however it might be with Anthony, Elmira was not in a hurry.

She told him she had faith in his future.

"You'll get there," she said. "I'm just perfectly certain you'll get there."

No man can escape a feeling of encouragement arising from such friendly prophecy, even though the good will of the prophet be, as is usual, in excess of the intelligence. Anthony

was pressing her warmly for the grounds of this certainty, and her replies were bringing him again very near to the dangerous ground which she had determined for the present to avoid, when Mrs Corder entered the room.

One of the children, she told Anthony, was seedy. It was the little girl, his particular friend; and she had heard his voice in the hall.

"I don't like to bother you," Mrs Corder went on, "but she says, if you will go up and see her, she'll go to sleep as 'good as good.'"

"Of course I will," he answered, genuinely flattered. "Don't you bother to come up. It's the little room behind yours, isn't it?"

And he ran up the stairs with the speed of youth and the silence of strength.

Miss Corder followed him with her eyes.

"He's quite silly about your children, Harriet," she said, and smiled as she said it. And yet Harriet knew that she was cross.

"It won't be called silly when the children are his own, Elmira," she answered. And Elmira took up her book.

Till Anthony returned neither of the women spoke again. The younger was silent because she was annoyed by the interruption of her *l'le-d-lle* with the man who had made her jealous of her little niece. And yet she knew that the interruption had come at the very moment when she most needed it. But the elder woman was troubled in her conscience. She knew Anthony would be an excellent match for her sister-in-law. She suspected that her husband thought the same. But she was fond of Anthony, and she almost wished that he had stayed in Leeds.

"I really believe you'll find the kid asleep, Mrs Corder," he said, as he came again into the room. "She promised, and I threatened never to do it again if she didn't go straight off." And then, speaking softly to the mother, "How pretty she looks!" he said, "and how bright her eyes are!"

A sharp-tongued fellow-countrywoman of Elmira's had once said that Miss Corder gave proof of her extreme modesty by regarding children as an indecency. Crystalline virginity, she added, should not have the brutal facts of life and humanity forced upon its notice. She had said it, possibly not without spite, to a man. And the man had replied that this kind ran a mighty close risk of getting crystallised.

Elmira, however, understood herself better; and, when this or some similar criticism was repeated to her, she took herself severely to task. Her modesty, in which she thoroughly believed, stood in no need, she was sure, of the crutch of prudery. But to herself she could not deny that not only did children weary her, but that they had also a habit most objectionable of reminding one of the consequences as well as of the causes of things. She did not, however, alter her objective, but merely set herself with great care and industry to cultivate the good opinion of such children as she came across. The results were much to the credit of her ability; most children seemed to like her, and the rest endured her with patience. But her task was harder with the boys; and she had moments of comic despair, in which she declared to herself that she would be driven to take the first husband that offered, if the younger Sigismund's going to school were much longer postponed.

She was quite sure she had never betrayed to Anthony her temperamental distaste for childhood; he certainly could not have heard what she had said as he ran up the stairs; yet he had lowered his voice as he spoke of the brightness of Sally's eyes; and she wondered by what instinct he had known that such matters had no echo in her heart.

But Anthony did not know it. Instinct makes a man do things, not know them.

"I think," said Elmira, "that the eyes of a child, awake when it ought to be asleep, are just perfectly lovely."

She spoke genuinely. She had seen those eyes, and wished her own as those were. For then, she knew, there would have been nothing she could not do.

Anthony heard her with a vague sense that he had done her injustice, though how he neither knew nor asked himself. But his spirits rose, and for another half-hour he talked very happily to the two women.

Before he went he had Mrs Corder's promise to bring Elmira with her to Cheyne Walk next time she should give Lady Mary a sitting. Lady Mary, he told her, in a moment when Elmira was out of earshot, had heard from him of her beauty, and hoped she need not be kept waiting for a sight of it until she found the time to make a call in form. Now in this case Mrs Corder was willing enough to waive ceremony. She considered Lady Mary a person of fashion, which she was not, and of distinction, which she was. And she felt that the

chances of the friendship which she desired were strengthened by Lady Mary's request to bring her sister-in-law. And yet, when Anthony was gone, Mrs Corder did not feel altogether pleased with herself.

Anthony walked back to his flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. As he let himself in with his key, he was amused to discover that he had been thinking, as he walked, very little of the exquisite Miss Corder, and a great deal of the things that Lord Ingestow had told him of his mother's family.

CHAPTER VI

THE CURIOSITY OF AXEL FORSBERG

ANTHONY was finishing his coffee next morning when Axel Forsberg came to him. After an exchange of rudimentary greetings, Forsberg stood by the window, biting an unlighted cigar, and looking at his friend with an expression upon his face which struck Anthony as unusual.

"What are you staring at?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Forsberg.

"Why don't you light your weed?"

"Waiting till you're through," said the other. Then, after a slight pause, during which he did not move his eyes from Anthony's face,

"I was thinking," he went on, "how you'd look without that dandy little moustache of yours."

Anthony rose from the table, lit a cigarette, and handed the matches to his friend.

"You talk like a woman, Forsberg," he said. "What the devil does my moustache matter?" And he twisted up the ends of it, giving them the cock imperial.

"Yes," said Forsberg, "that shows the mouth better. Oh, it's only that I saw a face somewhere lately that reminded me of yours; and I wondered how much difference the hair makes."

Here the American paused to light his cigar; but Anthony showed no curiosity. So Forsberg made a fresh start.

"Very pleasant fellow, that cousin of yours," he remarked.

"I don't think," said Anthony, "that I have one."

"I mean Lord Ingestow," explained Forsberg.

"He seemed pleasant," replied Anthony. "I hardly know him. He's my uncle."

"Of course—I remember you told me."

For the magnificent physique of this American whom he had met in Yorkshire, Anthony had a candid admiration. For his abilities he felt something more than admiration; particularly for that New World characteristic of keeping the mental eye fixed unswerving upon the main thread of the

worst tangle, whether in business or practical science; and of knowing, without loss of time or waste of words, the difference between an awkward corner and a blind alley—between a detail that can be handled afterwards, and a fact that must, now or never, be overcome. He desired, and, if a way could be found, intended to use this mental force—to absorb it into his own. Yet were there moments when, for all his beauty, force and adaptability to surroundings, the man jarred upon Anthony. And just now he felt, more than ever before, unwilling to listen to description even the most polite, or criticism however generous, of the family that had been so little to him. But he knew poor Forsberg could not understand this relatively oriental mode of feeling, and so forced himself to reply.

"I'm glad you got on with Ingestow," he said kindly. "What time did you get back?"

"Well before midnight. It didn't take long to teach him all he needed to know. He gave me supper at his club."

"Which is that?" asked Anthony.

Forsberg did not know. No one had told him. But he described accurately the club's position in Pall Mall.

"That's *The Wanderers'*. You are doing pretty well, young man, to arrive in London unknowing and unknown at mid-day, and to eat your Welsh rabbit at *The Wanderers'* at midnight."

"Oh, that's all right," said the American. "But I can't say it was the club impressed me most."

"What did impress you?" asked Anthony.

"A man I met there," replied Forsberg. "He was a guest too, I think. But I guess he's wandered further and fared worse than any of his hosts last night."

And once more Forsberg narrowed his eyes upon Anthony with intent inquiry. But this time Anthony did not seem to know himself an object of interest. He was turned towards the bleak, white-painted mantel.

"Put me next," he said, when he had rung the bell.

"Learning the language at last?" asked Forsberg.

"If you call it that. Think of the steamships, the shoes, bicycles, novels, plays, trusts, and women! I suppose," said Anthony, "that the Grecian slaves were learning Latin while they taught Greek. Who's your hero?"

"Randolph Bethune," replied Forsberg. His good humour was almost imperturbable; but just now he was upon

the verge of irritation with his host, and spoke with unaccustomed abruptness. Most things, even feelings, he could understand; but his own power of ruffling the serenity of men like Anthony Le Dane was a secret to him.

"The man who lost himself in China for ten years?" asked Anthony.

"That's the very thing he didn't do," replied Forsberg, speaking, Anthony thought, rather combatively. "Eight years ago he disappeared from Tonkin. He went to find China, and six months ago he bubbled up again in Cashmere. And it wasn't only China he found. He found Thibet—found her at home. He's brought away more of Western China and Thibet than any man before him. His book will be out next month, and they say the publishers have given him terms outside precedent."

"I shouldn't think the subject very popular," said Anthony.

In neither Randolph Bethune nor Western China was he at all interested. But Forsberg's enthusiasm roused his curiosity.

"They say it's the book itself they're betting on," explained Forsberg, "and that no one has ever written travels in the same way."

"Since Shakespeare there has been nothing like it," said Anthony, drily, "makes a good ad. for the mob; but logically it's ambiguous."

"I wonder, Le Dane," said the American gravely, "whether you're trying to sour on me. And if, why. I've been thinking you the whitest man I've struck over here. But, business apart, I begin to be sorry I came. It isn't my fault if I don't know in the dark the touch of every lever in a new machine. But you wanted to talk business to-day, so perhaps we'd better get to that and get through."

"Not yet," said Anthony; and he came across the little room and stood facing his friend.

"Why not yet?" asked Forsberg, a little fiercely; he had been touched, he thought, with that vague superiority which his countrymen are so ready to resent as conscious, and of which they are sensitive in proportion to their difficulty in defining it.

"Because," said Anthony, with a smile which, in spite of his erect bearing and unflinching gaze, held something of humility, "—because I think you as white a man as there is,

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and I'm sorry I did or said anything to make you think me less white than before."

Forsberg may have found the simplicity of this apology sentimental. If he did, the large smile with which he received it must have been due to a corresponding quality in his own nature.

"Besides," continued Anthony, "I want to hear about this book which interests you so much, though you haven't read it."

"It's the man—the man himself, Le Dane, not the book. I never saw such a man before. If even you turned me down, I'd be glad I came across to have merely spoken to him. If his writing comes anywhere near his talking, the book will make his fortune."

"Did he talk to you?" asked Anthony.

"Only a word or two. I was one of the crowd round him, and, by the Great God Bud!" said Forsberg, "but we did some listening. I don't suppose more than two or three of us cared a nickel for the Celestial Empire or anything in it. He only just told us one or two things that happened to him, but in two minutes you could almost smell the country and the people. When he stopped, more than one of us, I guess, was puzzled to find himself in that club-room in Pall Mall. He made an odd sort of apology for the pleasure he'd been giving us. 'I'm talking too much,' he said. 'But all your jolly English faces round me, and this intoxicating drug of civilisation that a man finds dangerous after roughing it for years, made me forget myself. I suppose,' he said, 'that there's hardly one of you ever saw me before. But while I was talking I had a feeling that you were all old friends that had been waiting for me to come back.'"

Anthony was listening now.

"Well?" he said. "Go on."

"Though it's six months since the world knew he was alive, he only reached England three days ago. He's been three months or more in some little place in Italy, working up his notes into the book. I don't think," Forsberg continued, "that there's more to tell you. I wanted you to know how great a pleasure had come to me through your introducing me to Lord Ingestow."

"You must thank yourself for that, Forsberg," said Anthony.

"It's no catch, thanking oneself," replied the other.

"Also, you know, I wanted to get you interested, because I want you to meet the man."

"Why?" asked Anthony.

Forsberg hesitated a moment before he replied.

"Well," he said at last, "you two would suit. You each affect me in the same kind of way. You'd understand him, Le Dane, even better than I did. You'd—the fact is, I've set my heart on seeing you together. I want to hear you talking. If I can get him, to lunch, dinner, anything, will you come?"

"Of course," answered Anthony, nearly laughing at the other's eagerness. "But how will you manage it? If he's so popular, and you were only one of the crowd last night—"

Forsberg knew well enough that his conspicuous person was not easily forgotten. But all he said was:

"You can leave that part to me, Le Dane."

Anthony laughed.

"I'm an ass to ask a question like that," he said. "As if I didn't know that you always get anything you want."

"It's odd you should use that phrase," exclaimed Forsberg; "for they're the very words that were in my mind to describe the man we've been talking about. When he turns those extraordinary black eyes on you and smiles, you know that he always gets it—is accustomed to get it. Of course it's likely he's been foiled, baulked and turned down as often as most men. He wouldn't carry that face if he hadn't. But what I mean is that when he looks at you, you can't believe in a man, still less a woman, saying no to him."

And here Axel Forsberg broke off suddenly, with a laugh at himself.

"You'll think me crazed," he said. "He's got something our newspapers call magnetism, I suppose. I want to see how the man strikes you."

"I understand," said Anthony. "I shall be interested to see whether he has the same kind of effect on me."

And then he unlocked his workshop, and they entered upon that discussion of business which Forsberg had demanded; and which to both of these ambitious young men seemed of higher importance than the personality of even the greatest Asiatic traveller. Anthony Le Dane must have his fortune, and only this undiscovered storage-battery stood in his way. Even now he was not without hope, for Forsberg too was on

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the same quest. In Leeds they had both heard a rumour which had brought them together to London.

Thinking soberly that in Forsberg he had at last found the man that must be allied with him in the venture of his life, Anthony was this morning resolved to tell him the secret of his plans; his plans, I mean, not for his ends, but for the attainment of his means. And therefore as he closed the door of his workshop, perched so high that the roar even of Shaftesbury Avenue ascended to his ears merely as the dulled, seething noise of a necessary pit, the memory of Forsberg's enthusiasm for a strange and wandering man slipped from Anthony's mind.

For he felt that great issues were this morning to be decided, and measured the importance of Randolph Bethune by the after-breakfast gauge of a cigarette and a half.

CHAPTER VII

THE INVITATION

ON a new Thames flowing past a new Cambridge through a new London to a Newhaven, Axel Forsberg had once pulled seven in a crew which had won an historic race. In search of a royal road to success in an art too difficult, the rival boat had that year adopted a stroke which they, or journalistic traducers, had named the "get-there." Once in their short acquaintance he and Anthony Le Dane had talked of rowing, Forsberg as one descending in idleness to memories of the nursery, but the Englishman with reverence for the historic continuity of a great sport. And Anthony had told his friend that the "get-there," as described to him, was a stroke good only for a scratch crew.

In Coventry Street, the morning after Forsberg had spoken to Anthony of Randolph Bethune, some words on a news-placard reminded the Harvard man of the Cambridge man's dictum; and in that very moment he collided not too gently with a stout, goodnatured-looking person, who at once began to justify his appearance by a kindly apology. This, however, he himself interrupted with an exclamation.

"Good Gad! Funny, isn't it? We met last night—no, the night before—at *The Wanderers*."

"Did we?" asked Forsberg aloud; "oh, yes." But inwardly he said: "The Yale stroke! Never mind your form, but bucket all you know."

"I stood next you while we listened to Bethune," said the stranger.

"Of course—I remember," replied Forsberg.

"One doesn't forget Randolph Bethune," said the other, with a little smile which made Forsberg uneasy for the success of his ambiguity.

Then he *bucketed*.

"I wish you'd tell me where he lives," he blurted out. "I most particularly want to know; and perhaps, as my speech bewrays me for a stranger, you'll take pity on me."

The stout man looked at Forsberg dubiously. What he

saw seemed to please him, for the smile came back to his face.

"You're not connected with the press, are you?" he asked.

"If I were," replied Forsberg, "I wouldn't need to ask you where Bethune hides his fame. Lord Ingestow brought me to *The Wanderers'* that night. This is my card."

"It's only a chance that I know myself," said the other, when he had read it. And then he gave Forsberg the name of a modest hotel in one of the narrow streets which run between the Strand and the river; and went away wondering why he had been so easily persuaded into a kindness of doubtful discretion.

Forsberg, however, was troubled by no scruples, and found his way through Trafalgar Square to the address so unscrupulously obtained.

The porter of whom he asked admission to Mr Bethune's presence was not of encouraging demeanour; but Forsberg volunteered his innocence of press-contamination, and the man mounted the stairs with his card. Two minutes later he returned and asked Forsberg to follow him.

Close at the heels of his guide, he entered a large, dingy, low-ceiled room. The door was closed silently behind him, and Forsberg looked round for the man upon whom he intended forcing his acquaintance.

It was a wet morning, but not what a Londoner would call cold. Yet in the grate burned a small, clear fire, though one of the windows—that which overlooked the river—was wide open. And on a seat near this fire was coiled the figure of a man, wrapped in a dark dressing-gown. The high back of the deep chair cast the figure into shadow, and all that the visitor could distinguish was a gleam of dark eyes.

Randolph Bethune did not rise when his visitor entered. He looked up keenly at the great form that towered before him, and remembered he had seen it before.

"Sit down, Mr Forsberg," he said, "and excuse me if I keep my chair. These wet days I have a good deal of pain in my right leg. It is an active reminder of some friends in Thibet and their pretty hospitality to the stranger within their gates."

Forsberg sat.

"We've seen each other before, somewhere," said Bethune.

"Yes," replied Forsberg. "That's why I came. But you surely didn't remember my name?"

"No," said the other. "To be honest—nothing but your size."

"Which wasn't specified on my visiting-card," said the American. "So I just wonder why you let me come up."

"You told the man you were not a journalist," began Bethune—and stopped.

"That's so," said Forsberg, with encouragement in his tone.

Bethune smiled.

"I'm rather dull here this morning," he said, making a fresh start.

"And so you thought you'd like to see the American that said he hadn't an axe to grind?"

"Yes," said Bethune.

"But I have—I always have," Forsberg went on. "I'll tell you first who I am." Which he proceeded to do, following up his brief autobiography with an account of the interest his host had aroused in him at *The Wanderers*. "And I've come this morning to ask you to dine with me to-night," he said in conclusion.

Bethune was amused.

"Why should I?" he asked, smiling.

"For as many reasons as you like. I mean there's no end to the reasons I can give you," answered Forsberg. "First—because the dinner will be a good one. Second—because I shall have only one other guest; and thirdly, because the dinner will be eaten in a private room at any decent place you choose to select."

"If I choose the restaurant," objected Bethune, "how can you guarantee the quality of the dinner?"

"Because I shall order it," said the American, without a smile. "If you haven't made up your mind, I have more reasons."

"Don't spoil three good ones. All the same," said Bethune, "I should like to ask a question."

"Yes?" asked Forsberg politely.

"My fellow-guest—" said Bethune.

"He, at least, has no dull axe—not even a pen-knife. Everything about him is keen—except his curiosity to meet you."

"Did he also need persuasion?"

"Well," said the American, "it wasn't exactly that. But he didn't believe I'd get you to come, you see."

"And didn't care whether you succeeded or not?"

Forsberg had the wit to admit that his friend had not seemed to care.

"I'll come, then, Mr Forsberg. Will you tell me who the gentleman is?" asked Bethune, now thoroughly amused. "One sometimes fails to catch a name on introduction."

"A man I met three weeks ago in business, and froze to for better reasons," replied Forsberg. "His name is Le Dane. He's an engineer. I'm an engineer, as I told you."

"Yes," said Bethune; and nursed his leg once more. For the last few minutes he had almost forgotten it. But that was not the fault of the leg.

"After hearing you and seeing you the other night," added Forsberg, "I made up my mind that you two were men that ought to meet. And when my mind is made up—"

"Other men have to make up theirs?" suggested Bethune.

"They're apt to find it save trouble," admitted Forsberg, rising. "Now I'll go—before you change yours."

Bethune wished the man would stay, but only asked, rising also, where and at what hour the dinner would be.

"Eight o'clock, if that suits you," said Forsberg. "Where, I don't yet know. But it'll be a good one, and I'll send something comfortable to fetch you along."

Left alone, Bethune walked, limping slightly, to the window, and looked out over the leaden-grey river, wishing things.

He wished he were back in the little Italian town where he had finished the writing of his book. He wished that the book were yet to write; for he had upon him the slackness that comes after a long task accomplished. He thought of the great success he had reached; and it seemed a success far off, and belonging to someone else. He thought of his life, like a flat map seen in a glance; and wished it other than it had been. With a laugh of doubtful mirth, he almost wished he had been given the impossible option of living it, or not living it.

"I shouldn't have had the sense to say no," he thought. Even now, with all his width of experience, how much there was of which the intimate knowledge was denied him—how much of the things that are large and considered universal!

This thought fetched his eyes downward to the Embankment.

"I should have been up here," he mused, "when *They* asked me to decide, without ever having been down there."

His eye was unconsciously following a child that ran. The child tripped and fell; and, before the small, outspread hands struck the flagstones with the smack that he felt though he could not hear it, the man's whole body started with the violent instinctive desire to prevent the impact. Bethune watched while a passer-by raised the boy and stilled his cries with copper. Then he limped back to his fire, jingling loose money in a pocket.

"After all," he muttered, "I don't believe, for all I've seen and done, that I've ever been down there at all."

They were horribly grey, both sky and river; and even his clear, small fire had languished while his back was turned. Yet somewhere—where, for a moment, he could not tell—there was a gleam of light; something shone—or seemed, at least, to promise shining.

He searched a little, and found that he was looking forward to the dinner with two boys whom he did not know.

CHAPTER VIII

RANDOLPH BETHUNE GOES OUT TO DINNER

THERE was little in his bearing, however, to suggest mental depression, when Bethune entered the room which Axel Forsberg had engaged for his dinner of three.

If eyes were ever black, and if eyes were ever known to flash, they were this man's on this night. No limp spoiled his gait, and his swallowed cheeks were warm with a dull-red flush.

Till the man entered the room, Anthony had felt that his friend had run the risk of making himself ridiculous. If he had not been worried, he would have been bored. But it is common experience that what we see destroys all memory of what we have expected. And Anthony, when once he had seen this man of crescent fame, with his air at once simple, attractive and compelling, forgot everything but that he had appetite both for his dinner and his company. Forsberg saw the change, and was pleased. But his regard of grave satisfaction was bent on his elder guest.

"I'm afraid I'm late," said Bethune. "It's so long since I put on a dress coat that I fussed over it."

"You're on time, Mr Bethune," said Forsberg. "I hope you were taken care of."

Without waiting for introduction, Bethune was shaking hands with Anthony.

"Taken care of!" he cried. "If I'd known it was the ~~room~~ in town since I've grown old to send a brougham for your guests, I should have dined out every night since I got back. It has a charm of romance, this dinner. I don't even know where I am."

"Didn't the coupé have windows?" asked Forsberg.

"It's only defect," replied Bethune. "They ought to have been shutters. Haroun Alraschid, Prince Florizel and Mr Sherlock Holmes all made me long for shutters. So I wouldn't look out. And the foot-warmer nearly sent me to sleep. After all this coddling, if you don't rob me, nor cut my throat, I shall expect to be fed on rice pudding and sterilised milk."

Forsberg handed him a small wine-glass.

"That's a cock-tail I mixed myself," he said.

When Bethune had swallowed it,

"It's less wise than the brougham," he said, "but quite as nice. The fact is, young gentlemen," he went on, as they were driven to their seats by the arrival of the oysters, "you have made me feel jolly." He was looking at Anthony, but remembered his manners and turned to Forsberg. "And when I feel jolly, I forget my sins. After that it doesn't take long to forget your prudence—does it?"

"Le Dane," said Forsberg, "has no sins, and mighty little prudence. So he won't understand you, Mr Bethune. But he's going to be a great man. If he came from my hemisphere, I'd think him too keen after the dollars. But I'm not sure he wants 'em for himself."

"Nobody does," said Bethune.

"Isn't that a little steep?" asked Forsberg.

"Oh, yes—I dare say," admitted Bethune. "But I used to read a thing we called Poly Con, when I was your age. The books said that man's first object in life was to buy cheap and sell dear. Their socialistic and other faddy critics were always crying 'How wicked!' I couldn't buy anything, and I had nothing to sell. But it used to strike me when I heard them talking, that most of the wicked, greedy men they were lumping into gangs of self-seekers, were after a new hat for the wife, a new pony for the girl, or Oxford, Sandhurst and Woolwich for the boys. The world is bad enough, without making it out worse than it is. Woolwich, Park Lane, hats and ponies aren't, perhaps, high ideals. But they aren't always pursued most selfishly by those that work hardest for them."

"Very few men work for themselves only, I suppose," said Anthony, tritely enough.

"Here's one, at least," said Forsberg.

"I'm afraid I'm another," confessed Bethune. "But it's not much fun. I have hardly a relative, and not a dependent in the world."

"And you, Le Dane?" asked the American.

"I have some people," admitted Anthony, "but they don't need me in that way."

"Then tell us," said Forsberg, "what you are going to do with those millions when they're made."

Anthony flushed.

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"I won't tell anybody that, Forsberg," he said. "I have told you I won't. If a man fails he has enough to do in meeting his own condemnation."

Bethune opened his eyes.

"If you dream of doing things, Mr Le Dane," he said, "you are right to keep the dreams a secret between yourself and your pillow."

"I have never told him," said Anthony, with recovered smile, "that I dreamed of anything. Nothing more, indeed, than that I was in a hurry to make a pile."

Something in the dark eyes, not unlike his own, that were bent upon him, appealed to the boy's enthusiasm. He emptied his glass and would have spoken again, when Forsberg prevented him.

"It'll take more than one man's pile to straighten out this crooked old world," he remarked. "And I believe that's about the size and shape of those dreams of yours, Le Dane."

Bethune could see that Anthony disliked the subject.

"It's a great thing," he said, with unwonted sententiousness, "to want to do anything at all. Stick to it for ever, Mr Le Dane, and keep it to yourself as long as you can."

He hoped this would be final; but Forsberg saw his guests already in sympathy which he wished to cement. So he smiled once more at Anthony's supposed idealism.

"Some years ago," he said, "the American people had a notion they were a young people, just because they'd been transplanted. To prove their youth, they started inventing Utopias—mostly as old as the hills, cooked over. But we've no use for milleniums now. We know too much about them. We know now we've always been as old as the rest of the world; the only new things we want are vices, medicines and religions."

And although Anthony could not be forced into revealing purposes or expressing beliefs of his own, Forsberg was successful in creating a unity of opposition to his own cynicism.

"Now that they are as thick as thieves," he said to himself after a while, "I can afford to be pleasant again."

He asked them how they liked the champagne, which they had been drinking with as little thought as is given to tea or ginger beer. Anthony praised the wine with frank ignorance, but Bethune with words of knowledge. This pleased the host, and led the three into discussion of drinks alcoholic in general; until Bethune challenged them to mention one that he had not

tasted. They wandered far, from *saki* to apple-jack, until some especially noxious fluid brought them to Tonkin. And from this point, because he was the simplest and kindest of men, Randolph Bethune, to gratify the curiosity he read in their faces, began to talk of himself and of his long disappearance from the world of telegraph and newspaper.

✻✻ This Forsberg had desired for Anthony's sake—because he had heard the strange music already. And Anthony had hoped for it, because Forsberg had told him of the man's golden tongue.

Dinner was long over, and the air was heavy with the smoke of their cigars, before Forsberg began to lead Bethune back to the early days of his connection with the press as war-correspondent; when suddenly, and without obvious relation, he told them of a thing that he had seen upon a battle-field.

It was a simple tale enough of the devotion of one life to another.

"You must have described that before, Mr Bethune," said Anthony.

"Such incidents are common enough, I am ready to believe," said Bethune, surprised by the boy's earnestness. "Now I think of it, I did try to write it—"

"No," said Anthony, with a smile, "I didn't read it. I saw it—saw the face of the man who had given his clothes and then added his naked body to keep his officer warm—I have seen it all just as you have told it, sir—the frozen bliss of the dead, and the furrowed peace of the wounded man that slept too sound to know his blankets. You see," he explained, "it's my aunt's picture—the picture that made her name."

Now Bethune, perhaps from the lowering of Anthony's voice when he spoke of Lady Mary, though he heard all the rest, missed the word *aunt*.

"Sentimental pictures on such subjects," he said, drily, but not unkindly, "are not uncommon—Royal Academy, and German prints. In the prints there is generally a German angel to fill up. The reason is obvious. The German caterer knows the Englishman's love of angels—even German angels—and the people who pay shillings at Burlington House understand sermons better than painting."

Axel Forsberg saw Anthony biting as much of his moustache as his teeth could reach. So he took his cigar from his mouth and spoke.

"That work of art, Mr Bethune," he said, serenely un-

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aware that his phrase jarred upon four ears, "is too well known to have escaped any man less distantly occupied than you have been these last eight years. The painting, I seem to remember, is here in London on the walls of the Tate Gallery. But in fame, in photograph, in engraving, in the three-colour process, in chromolithograph, and in photogravure, it is spread over the intelligent earth. *Munsey* or *Frank Leslie's* should have met you with it in Lhasa. And I'm bound to admit," added Forsberg, "that your words just now made the finest description of that picture I'm likely to hear."

Bethune looked curiously from one man to the other. He felt he had slipped, but how, he could not tell.

Then, to Forsberg,

"Who did you say was the painter?" he asked.

"I didn't say. It's not my line. I seem to remember it's a name with a handle to it. But Le Dane here has just said it was painted by his aunt."

Bethune rose from his chair and came round to Anthony.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I hope you will overlook it. I did not hear you say that."

The boy looked up at him with a smile.

"There's no harm done," he replied. "And the picture is a sermon—as your description would be, sir, to any man with a mind."

"What penance shall I do?" asked Bethune, with kindly humour.

"Go and see the picture," said Anthony. "And you'll fancy you painted it yourself."

"That's where my punishment will come," said the other. "I've thought pictures all my life, but the painting always beat me."

And afterwards, though he did not forget, Bethune found himself too shy to ask the name of the aunt of Anthony Le Dane.

An hour later, when the brougham was taking him one way, and their legs the two younger men another,

"It's a strange thing," began Forsberg—and suddenly ceased.

"What is strange?" asked Anthony, absent-minded; he was thinking of Randolph Bethune.

"Paternity," said Forsberg; adding, in explanation: "the paternity of an idea, I mean."

CHAPTER IX

"THE GREATER LOVE"

THE next morning was fine, and Randolph Bethune rose early. His leg did not trouble him to-day. One might even say that he was not troubled at all. For his heart felt unusually light, and in his sleep fate, or his dinner, or himself had made dreams for him, of the kind which a man tries next morning to recover, until his affairs blot and smudge them back into the mass of the dull and the trite.

But Bethune had that morning no business that must be done; and his purpose, still active from the night before, to visit the Tate Gallery, was not of the kind to dissipate too soon the rainbow of memory that comes in sleep.

He walked from his hotel along the Embankment, and had reached Boadicea's unbridled steeds before he had firmly in his grasp the hem of Iris's garment.

"Of course it was that boy's face made me dream of her." The thought struck him suddenly—unexpectedly; even as he had resolved to give up the search, dream and its cause leapt together into the picture-frame of memory.

"It was no real likeness—not a feature—not a colour—perhaps hardly an expression. But something there was—and it's his fault I dreamed what I did dream."

After a while he was in Great Smith Street. The wharfs and the sordid houses lowered his mind to things of less import than dreams.

"So it was his aunt that painted my picture! Well," he thought, "that is what we are going to see about."

His leg began to hurt him again, and he got into a stray hansom. Before they reached the Gallery, the open river had enlivened him once more, so that he cheerfully overpaid the cabman, and walked painlessly up the steps. In a twenty-minutes' saunter round the rooms Bethune almost forgot the faint reason of his coming; when suddenly he found himself absorbed in the picture which last night he had described without knowing that it had ever been painted. And, as he looked, the picture grew in colour and intensity; but from the frame outwards all things were blank to him.

When knowledge of his surroundings intruded again, he tried to read, in the right-hand corner of the canvas, the rough signature of the artist. The attempt failing, he cleared his vision by concentration upon the plate below the picture; cleared it, but not sufficiently to read.

Near him stood a shabby, middle-aged woman in black, who seemed to have come there by mistake. But even her the picture was holding by the mere force of its appeal to the sacrificial instinct of humanity.

Bethune turned to her; his gaze wavering, she thought that he was drunk.

"I should be exceedingly obliged, madam," he said, "if you would tell me the name of the painter of this picture."

She looked at him with vague curiosity, as wondering how he should see the picture and not read the name. Then, with something of effort, "Greater Love Hath No Man Than This," she read.

"Yes—yes," said Bethune, with impatience. "But the painter?"

The shabby black bonnet bent a little nearer.

"Lady Mary Frozier, 1898," she read.

For perhaps the first time in his life Randolph Bethune failed in courtesy to a woman. As she saw him turn his back upon her and walk out of the building, the woman was confirmed in her suspicion that the gentleman had taken too much to drink.

And almost at the same moment of time, a little further up the river and on the same side of it, the painter of the picture stood in her studio, pretending to paint another, while Bethune's fellow-guest of the night before sat perched on the high stool, at once spoiling her work and making her heart rejoice.

He had told her upon what day she might expect the Corders, and had added that he and Axel Forsberg would come the same afternoon. He had told her of his chance meeting with her brother, Ingestow, and was about to tell her of how that meeting had led to the eccentric dinner of last night, when he suddenly broke off.

"How was it you came to paint your great picture, Aunt Mary?" he asked. Then he laughed. "They're all great to me, dear," he said. "You know that. But I mean 'The Greater Love.'"

Lady Mary smiled.

"It's funny you should ask me that," she said. "I was thinking of it last night. Did I never tell you about it?"

"No," said Anthony.

"One day," said Lady Mary, "—it must have been nearly six years ago—I was miserable. You were at Cambridge. It was in your first year. I was longing to run down—oh, my dear, I beg your pardon—up, I mean."

"It's down now," said Anthony, laughing.

"Oh!" cried the woman. "But you used to be so particular!"

"I'm getting more particular," said Anthony. "Well—you were longing to run down, but—"

"But I knew I ought not."

"I wish you had."

"You wouldn't have liked it then. You were so busy, dear Tony, trying to see yourself a man." She uttered a queer little chuckle. "Don't laugh at me, dear boy, if I tell you that I had dressed myself for the journey, and had put money in my purse, and had sent for a cab, when my conscience smote me. I knew you were best let alone, and I took off my hat, sent a shilling out to the cabman, and tried to paint. That, of course, was the last thing I could do. So I took up the paper and tried to read. And I read a great deal, I think, that didn't matter. But at last a thing caught my eye—a thing that pleased me. It was an account of that—that picture—told by a man that said he had seen it himself. I tore the piece out of *The Morning Post*—you know how I love keeping anything that pleases me, Tony."

"Now," said Anthony, "I understand the whole thing."

"That is what you always think, dear boy," said Lady Mary. "But you don't this time. At the moment it was merely the raw incident that took my fancy—perhaps the great sacrifice of the poor, stupid Russian peasant-soldier appealed to me because I had just made a little sacrifice myself—I don't know. But I do know that but for an accident it might have been years or never before I looked at the bit of paper again. When I did read it again, there was a phrase in the description that sent me back to—almost to my childhood. There was a man that was kind to me when I was a girl. He taught me the beginnings of all I have done, Tony." And she looked at Anthony with an appeal of apology. "He could have taught me the middle and the end—and far beyond, I think. But there wasn't much time."

"Could he paint himself?" asked Anthony.

"He said," replied Lady Mary, "that he was a failure."

"Clever people often say that."

"And clever people are often right. Well," continued Lady Mary, "that single phrase in the newspaper-cutting was the beginning of it. It sent me back to his criticisms and explanations. It seemed to show me that, if there was a picture here, it was one picture—to be done in one way and no other. I seemed to hear him telling me to paint, and all the months that I was painting it, telling me how I must do it. That's all, Tony. It was a curious mental accident—and a very lucky one for me, wasn't it?"

"I suppose it was. Anyhow, it's the only picture of its type I ever liked," he answered. "What was the man's name?"

"I don't know, dear," said Lady Mary.

"I mean that man that used to teach you things."

"I don't think I ever heard it. In—in the company where we met," she explained, "he was always known by a nickname. And he went away very suddenly."

Anthony asked to see the cutting, and she fetched it for him from that same little drawer where she kept the old sketch-book. He read it carefully.

"I think I know the man," he said.

"Indeed!" she cried. "That is very strange." For she was thinking of what they had been saying, not of the time-yellowed bit of paper she was taking from his fingers.

"I mean the man that wrote the paragraph," said Anthony.

"Oh, that's quite another thing," replied Lady Mary. "I dare say you do. Though it was written a long time ago. Who is he?"

"Randolph Bethune," said Anthony.

"The man that the papers are talking of? The Tonkin, Lhassa, Cashmere man? The man that was eight years lost?"

"That's it," said Anthony; and told her of Axel Forsberg's dinner-party. "So I think he must have written that," he said in conclusion. "I want you to meet him."

"I should like very much to meet him," said Lady Mary.

"Then I'll see if he'll come on Friday, when you have all those other people," he suggested.

"That will do very well," she answered. "If I don't

like him, he won't bother me so much. And if I do, he can come again."

Anthony got off the stool, as if to go.

"You're an awful hermit, dear," he said. "You see hardly anybody."

"Quite as many, Tony," she replied, smiling at him, "as I want to see. But not quite so much of him as I should like."

Anthony sat down again, but not on the high stool.

"I was going to lunch at the Corders," he said. "I promised little Sally." Then he told her of the child and her pretty ways. At last, "Miss Corder's a very beautiful girl, Aunt Mary," he went on. "I wish, when you know her, you'd ask her to sit to you."

Lady Mary laughed gently.

"Why should I?" she asked.

"To please me," he replied. "I want to see more of her, and I should like to see her here."

"The fact is, dear boy, you can't make up your mind whether you are in love with her or not."

"I think I was the night before last," said Anthony.

"And you think perhaps you'll be able to make sure," said Lady Mary with unaffected gaiety, "if you can come here and look at her in these surroundings—with me and the studio and Chelsea for background. You are trying to make love, Tony—you're not in it."

Anthony grunted.

"Don't be cross," she went on. "I'm not. Tell me why you talk to me about her?"

"She's so pretty," said Anthony, feebly. "Sometimes I can't get her out of my head. I thought if I talked to you, p'r'aps she'd go."

"You dear old boy," cried Lady Mary, trying to rumple his hair. Its shortness preventing, she stooped and kissed him. "You're rather nice, Tony, but you're not in love."

"I think you are rather horrid, Aunt Mary," he retorted. "And I want to know how you know I'm not."

Lady Mary ignored his question.

"If somebody were throwing vitriol about, Anthony," she asked, "whose face would you shield—Miss Corder's or mine?"

Anthony stared at her in disgust.

"What a silly question!" he exclaimed.

Lady Mary turned again to her canvas.

"Yes, dear," she said softly. "I'll ask Miss Corder to stay here, if you like. Certainly I will paint her—paint her as long as she will sit and in as many aspects as you like. And now I really must work."

"That means I must go."

"It means," said Lady Mary, "that I'm much nicer than you think. I'm giving you the chance to do it gracefully, dear."

So Anthony went once more into Bayswater, trying to discover the secret of his own sensations.

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER ANTHONY

ANTHONY JAMES FROZIER, Earl of Ingestow and Viscount Wrotham, was an ordinary young man of his day and his class. If he fell a little behind the average in his vices, he rose somewhat above it in certain old-fashioned prejudices, and so kept things even.

On the Friday following his meeting with his nephew, he happened to breakfast with his mother. Towards the end of the meal he spoke.

"My sister Mary," he said, "doesn't care a dump whether she ever sees me again or not. Sister Mary probably knows not my name nor my age nor my face. If I tell her who I am, she'll just tick me off as the son of Lady Blanche's enemy. But when you're a solitary uncle, you've got to live up to the position."

"What is a solitary uncle?" asked the dowager Lady Ingestow.

"A man with one nephew and no nieces," said her son.

"Who's your nephew?"

"Young Le Dane."

"You seem to think he's Mary's offspring—from the way you talk," said Lady Ingestow with a sneer.

"You know well enough I know he's Blanche's," replied Ingestow. He postponed anger, hoping to find out what his mother was driving at.

"Do I? Well, if you ask me, I don't know anything. He's just as likely to be Mary's, as far as that goes," said his mother.

"What the devil d'you mean?"

"I mean that I don't believe Blanche ever had a child."

"Why?"

"She was—was too old," said the woman. "I've never believed it."

"Rot, my dear, scandalous mater—sheer rot," said her son. "You can't make a woman barren just by hating her."

"Don't be coarse, Ingestow. You disgust me."

This made him laugh, and saved his temper.

"I know the boy," he said.

"What does that prove?" asked Lady Ingestow.

"You'd better not say such things to anyone else," said the son.

"I don't," said the mother. "It's your fault that I said them even to you. Why did you suddenly spring the subject on me? It always makes me ill."

"Because I'm going to call at No. 7B Cheyne Walk this afternoon," he replied.

"I wonder where Cheyne Walk is," murmured Lady Ingestow.

"You've plenty of smart friends living there or in worse places near it," he retorted.

"Who lives at No. 7B?"

"Lady Mary Frozier. It's a bit odd, you know," said Ingestow, "if I have to find her on the map for you."

"My dear child," she replied, "I know where she is and what she is—I know, indeed, a great deal more about her and her set than you would know if you called upon her for a twelvemonth."

"Then I must say you ask a lot of unnecessary questions," growled her son. "But what you know of her can't be anything bad."

"Umph!" said the woman. "And why not?"

"Because you'd have told it me, with embellishments, long ago," he replied. "You and Blanche hated each other, and said it was about surplices and hell and incense—but it wasn't. It was the old, fairy-tale *step* business. And poor Mary—who's a beautiful and distinguished woman, and all off her own bat, too—doesn't even, I suppose, know high from low, nor a cope from a chasuble. But she loved Blanche, and so you hate her—hate her even to the point of petting any fool that says she can't paint."

"What?" cried Lady Ingestow.

"I heard a man do it to please you. You liked it, and showed it. And I think that's silly," said Ingestow.

"Why are you going there to-day?" asked his mother, glad to get back to the main subject.

"Because I've two empty hours this afternoon."

"And why do you tell me?"

"Because it's safer to tell you before than after."

"Safer?"

"Safer for you, mother. You know Masson says you

must control your—your emotions," said Ingestow, smiling kindly at the fat, handsome woman across the table. "It's a funny thing that you always get 'em worse over something that's done and can't be helped, than over something that's going to be done if you can't prevent it."

"Oh, go to Chelsea," said Lady Ingestow.

Now Ingestow found that his two hours were not quite in the right place. He consoled himself with the reflection that he was more likely to find his sister at home and alone at three o'clock than at five.

The maid would have left him in the library while she went to see if Lady Mary were disengaged. But Ingestow had an odd feeling of familiarity with the sister he remembered only from his schoolboy visit to her house, and felt inclined to take liberties in it now that he had come to it once more. So he stealthily followed the servant, and as she opened the door at the head of the five steps into the painting-room, he walked deliberately past her. Lady Mary, out of what the Scotch call the tail of her eye, perceived a man's figure above her, and still painting, cried out:

"Is that you, Anthony?"

"Yes," said Ingestow.

She looked up sharply at the sound of his voice. And he saw a face that made him glad he had come.

"All male Froziers like to be called Anthony," he said. And that told her enough to make her lay down palette and brushes where she would rather have seen the other Anthony sitting. She went to meet him, and his hand closed upon hers.

"Are you really my sister Mary?" he asked, holding it, and regarding her with admiration undisguised.

"If you are Ingestow—yes," she answered.

"I wish I hadn't been a fool," he exclaimed.

"I don't know you well enough," said Lady Mary, "to reassure you."

"If you did," said her brother, "you'd be glad to see me."

"I am, anyhow—really," she answered. "I won't even ask you why you never came before. But I will ask you to sit down—and why you have come now—and to smoke one of Tony's cigars."

And she pushed him into a low chair, brought him the carved-oak box, and stood in front of him while, with eyes fixed on her face, he mechanically helped himself to tobacco.

"You are very beautiful, Mary," he said, when she had given him a light.

"I am glad you find me so," she answered, sitting opposite to him. "Tell me all about it."

"I should have come long ago," he began; "but you went and made yourself famous at just the wrong time."

"Oh!" cried his sister. "So you punished me for my threepennyworth of success, Ingestow?"

"My name's Anthony," he said, "and I'm your nearest living relative."

"You're not too late to be my brother," Lady Mary answered, smiling. "But you are too late to be Anthony. You chose your time, you see; and I have an Anthony that I call my own. And he chose his."

"You mean Blanche's boy?"

Lady Mary nodded.

"Oh, well, it's my fault. Call me what you like—if you'll be nice to me."

"As nice as I can," said Lady Mary.

"That other Anthony of yours, you know, is a very decent sort of chap," said Ingestow.

"Very decent—for an old woman's pet nephew, more than decent," replied his sister. "But I know all about him and his decency. Now, as you have come, I'm going to put you through a catechism about a lot of things and people I haven't seen or heard of since I was a little girl. And if you take trouble to answer me, I shall know you mean to be good to me."

And so, of the old houses in town and country, of old servants whom she had known in their prime but he in the yellow leaf; of that Anthony who was father to both of them, and whom she had last seen speechless upon his death-bed, they talked; and he told her kindly and simply the little he could of the much she wanted to know.

Suddenly he looked at his watch.

"Quarter past four," he exclaimed. "I must bolt."

"Don't," said Lady Mary. "I want you to stay. The other Anthony's coming. And a patient."

"Good Lord!" cried Ingestow. "What's that? You aren't a Christian Scientist, are you?"

"No. But I make them suffer," she replied. "And I have no chloroform, ether, hypnotism, egoism nor laughing-gas to make them natural and comfortable. So they are patients."

"I'll give you a commission, if you like, and sit as still and natural as you please, Mary," said her brother.

"You couldn't—not any better than the rest," said Mary.

"I should look at you while you painted."

Lady Mary laughed.

"The patient that's coming said that," she replied. "She's bringing her American husband's sister with her to-day. They tell me she is a wonderfully beautiful girl. And Mr Forsberg's coming. And Anthony said he'd try to bring the great Randolph Bethune."

"How does my little nephew come to know the great man?" asked Ingestow.

"Through Mr Forsberg."

"Forsberg again!" exclaimed Ingestow. "How did he manage it?"

"I think he asked them both to dinner—and they came," said Lady Mary. "Mr Forsberg seems to be a man that can manage other things as well as motor-cars."

Ingestow laughed.

"That reminds me," he said. "Does your patient with the lovely American sister-in-law live in Bayswater?"

"I think they do," said Lady Mary.

"The other Anthony—" began her brother, and checked himself; "the only Anthony, I mean, was in a great hurry to get to Bayswater that night. My dear and neglected sister, I will stay."

And just then the Corders were announced.

Elmira Corder had often wished to be an actress—an actress, that is, who should spend her career in entrances from the back of the stage, with seven steps to descend before she reached it. This time she had only five, but so well did she descend them that Ingestow forgot Anthony Le Dane while he looked up at her. And Lady Mary looked up at Miss Corder because Anthony Le Dane was never out of her thought.

Elmira's descent was a success, and the painter admired her visitor hardly less than did her brother. Yet with Lady Mary's approval of this brilliant young woman's person and its adornment was mixed a feeling which made Ingestow's evident subjugation not a little pleasing to her.

When Anthony came, half an hour later, bringing Forsberg with him, he found Harriet Corder posed upon the dais, and no one else in the room but Lady Mary at her easel.

As soon as Forsberg had been introduced, Anthony asked for Miss Corder.

"You promised to bring her, you know," he said to Harriet.

"Miss Corder is quite safe," said Lady Mary. "But I had to do *some* work, Tony, and they chattered so that I shut them up in the boudoir. Take Mr Forsberg in there, and I'll ring for tea."

She released her sitter, who went with the two men into the little room whose windows looked out upon the narrow green garden.

Anthony was well pleased to find Ingestow already at home in his sister's house. Engrossing as was the converse in which he found his uncle engaged with Miss Corder, she turned to the nephew with pleasure so simple and evident, that he felt she was showing him to Ingestow as the older friend. Anthony's was not, indeed, a temperament easily assailable by jealousy. His egoism was in alliance too close with good manners and modesty. So far, moreover, as his experience reached, he had found himself always gratified, as by a subtle personal compliment, when he saw others admire what he much prized himself. For hitherto, no man had tried with success to take his prize from him.

Anthony inquired after the drunken *chauffeur*.

"He's at the door with the car," said Ingestow. "Or letting her glide over the humps of the Embankment to show off her beauty."

"Isn't that hard on the public?" asked Forsberg.

"I don't think so," replied his lordship. "He has one great virtue—caution."

"Caution!" exclaimed the American.

"Yes. It was you pulled him out from underneath my car," said Ingestow. "He was there because he's afraid of himself when he's loaded. But this merit is almost neutralized by a greater drawback."

"What is that?" asked Elmira.

"His wife," said Ingestow.

"You ought not to blame every woman whose husband gets tipsy," said Mrs Corder.

"I don't. But this one is pretty," said Ingestow.

"He ought to run away from her, if he wants to drive," said Forsberg. "Is it temper or flirting?"

"Mostly temper," said Ingestow.

"Did you scold him very badly?" asked Elmira.

"Not a bit," he answered, laughing. "I sent for the woman."

Elmira was interested.

"What did you say to her?" she asked.

"I told her I was going to raise her husband's screw. As she had come trembling with fear of the other thing, she cried.

"'Go and send him round here jolly,' I said, 'with the car. Keep him jolly, my good girl, and I'll keep you and the children jolly. If he gets loose after this, though,' I said, 'he'll never drive a car again.'

"'What am I to do?' she asked, when she could speak.

"'Keep your temper and don't flirt,' I answered.

"'What's he told you?' cried the young woman, red as beet-root.

"'Nothing,' said I. 'He's not that sort.'

"'If he gets drunk when it's not my fault,' said the girl, 'that wouldn't be fair.'

"'It's not fair to keep him on now,' I answered. 'If that happens, it'll leave us about square.'

"So she went away. And now, if I feel any doubt of the man, I ask after the missus."

"Well?" inquired Mrs Corder and Elmira in a breath.

"It's only a few days," replied Ingestow. "So far, he beams and looks as if he'd like to talk about her virtues."

"I'm afraid your wife will have a hard time, Lord Ingestow," said Elmira.

"If she can't keep me from drinking too much," he replied, "she probably will."

And then Lady Mary called them back to the studio. The boudoir, she said, was too small for tea. The best of it, she added, was the sunlight, and they would leave the door open.

"You're rather a fraud, aren't you, Le Dane?" said his uncle, a little later. "Lady Mary told me you were going to bring the great Bethune."

"The great Bethune wouldn't come," said Anthony.

"You've seen him?" cried Mrs Corder.

"This morning," said Anthony.

"What did he say?" asked Elmira.

"He asked me to lunch," replied Anthony.

"What did you do?" asked Mrs Corder.

"We ate it," said Anthony, laughing. "To save you others the trouble of asking questions," he added, looking at

Lady Mary and Forsberg, who was almost obsequious in relieving her of newly filled tea-cups, "I'll say at once that it was at the Savoy—that it was good—that we drank Vin de Grave—and that the Great Chinaman knows something about cigars."

"He seems to have taken a fancy to you, anyhow, Tony," said Lady Mary. "Why wouldn't he come?"

"It may have been *couldn't*," he answered. "But I don't think he cares much for women."

"Then it's a good thing he didn't come," said Elmira.

"I don't agree with you," said Mrs Corder. "Lady Mary would have converted him."

Before Anthony came, Lady Mary had heard her brother persuading Mrs Corder and Elmira to let him drive them in his drag to Sandown Park. Races and four-in-hands were novelties to the elder woman, if not to the younger. And Ingestow himself was a new thing to both. Yet their pleasure in the prospect was less than Lady Mary's.

"You shouldn't make fun of the middle-aged, Mrs Corder," she said. "They are really more to be pitied than the old."

In the moment of speaking she looked so young, her face was flushed with so delicate a colour, and her eyes shone with a light so clear and gay, that they all laughed at her.

Forsberg asked her to make good her statement.

"They're regretting the past and dreading the future more than either deserves," she explained. "Now the old—do any of you know Mr Jermyn?" she asked, breaking her sentence.

"The water-colour artist?" asked Elmira. "I've met him. He must be eighty at least."

"Seventy-seven last February," said Lady Mary. "He came to see me last week. He said he was really enjoying himself for the first time in his life. 'There's nothing to be anxious about now, my dear,' he told me. 'I've got through somehow, and there's time to look round.'" Then she added, after a little pause of hesitation: "I do believe that either end of life is happier than the middle."

Anthony told her that she would be old before she was middle-aged.

Forsberg made a little speech of prettiness rather elaborate.

The others laughed again, and Lady Mary relapsed once more into that silence of hers which seemed to set her aloof.

When they were all gone but himself, Anthony asked her opinion of his friends.

"Your giant I like," she told him. "He is splendid. You may keep him. You must keep him—because," she explained, her gaze bent upon him with a luminous expression of love—"because I want my boy to keep everything that is good for him; and Mr Forsberg is good for you."

"I'm glad you think that," he replied. "But the others—am I to keep Elmira, for instance?"

"If she is already 'Elmira'," said Lady Mary, "it's most likely too late to tell you whether I think she should be kept or not."

"It's not too late to listen," he answered. But his face was hard, and Lady Mary's heart was pinched when she appealed to it in vain for the smile she expected.

"Dear boy," she cried, with gentle passion, "I only want to tell you what I see or feel. I—I have never been married, as you know; but I once heard a man that had a large family, telling how he had wished and prayed for the power to endow each of his children with his accumulated experience. 'So that each might begin,' he said, 'with just that much start and advantage.'"

Anthony smiled rather grimly.

"How much profit did he reap," he asked, "of his prayers and his wishes?"

"None," said Lady Mary; "according to his own admission, none at all. 'Every man,' he said, 'in spite of heredity, education and environment, has in himself to begin again at the beginning—or very much nearer the beginning than we like to believe.'"

"I thought," said Anthony, "that Weissman was old-fashioned."

"So I ought to know better, oughtn't I, dear," she continued, not heeding his interruption, "than to say things that will only make me unpopular. But I'd risk your anger—and worse than your anger, Tony," she added softly, "rather than leave anything unsaid that might serve you."

"Why do you dislike her?" asked the boy bluntly.

"I don't dislike her," answered Lady Mary, "but you would dislike her when you'd been married to her for a year."

"To suppose the absurd," said Anthony, "let us suppose that I could give up Miss Corder on your *ipse dixit* of her unsuitability."

"The absurd," said Lady Mary, with a faint smile, "is supposed."

"Then, whatever happened after," he went on, "I might any day, and most likely very often should, believe that things might have been different and better if I hadn't taken your advice."

"Oh, Anthony!" she exclaimed. "I'm not advising you. You asked me to say what I think."

"Yes," he replied, "I know. And there's only one way to prove which is right."

He kissed her tenderly, and his foot was upon the fourth stair to the door before he thought of the last word he had to say. He turned and said it without descending.

"Don't cry, dear."

She was not weeping, but he thought he knew what would fall when he was gone.

"Don't cry. You know you are more to me than all the pretty girls in the universe."

"That's it, Tony," she cried. "That's just it. I shouldn't be, if she were *the* girl."

CHAPTER XI

SYMPATHY

LADY MARY FROZIER had said that Randolph Bethune had taken a fancy to Anthony Le Dane. And Anthony used to say that the stairs to his listless flat were the sieve of friendship. Yet he was not always pleased when they were mounted in quest of him.

One morning, nearly a fortnight after the day when Bethune had refused to accompany him to Cheyne Walk, Anthony sat in his workshop. Since nine o'clock he had been at work on a mass of papers, which Forsberg had brought him to "knock the bottom out of, if he could."

Following the clue they had picked up in Leeds, they had found the man they looked for; but whether the man were the genius they hoped—whether, in short, he had, as he declared, the thing that they needed, the two friends were now to prove.

So Forsberg was watching practical experiments in Hackney, with his rising hope hidden by grave face and taciturn lips; while Anthony, high above Shaftesbury Avenue, was engaged as a matter of duty on the task which to many is a labour of love.

At noon, after tracing three different clues of possible error each to its vanishing point, he had lighted at last, he thought, upon something more serious; when his servant knocked hesitatingly at the workshop door.

"I told you I'd see no one," he growled. "Send him away, Shinniver!"

"Yes, sir," said the man. "I wouldn't have gone against your orders for anyone else. But it's the gentleman the papers call the Great Chinaman, sir. He seemed tired with climbing the stairs, and I asked him to sit down. And then I thought—"

"Ask Mr Bethune to come in here," said Anthony; and wondered, as Shinniver closed the door, why he had said yes when he had meant to say no.

For in this short acquaintance the personality of the elder

man had appealed to the younger far more strongly than the youngster was aware.

Bethune, limping into the workshop, may have detected on Anthony's countenance some trace of his annoyance; for, in spite of the smile and the outstretched hand which welcomed him, his first words were:

"Why did you let me come in, when you're so busy?"

Anthony laughed outright.

"That's a question I have just failed in answering to myself," he said. "I meant to say no. It must be your fault, sir, somehow, that I didn't."

He made his visitor sit in the best chair, and asked if his leg were troubling him.

Bethune glanced up curiously in the boy's face. He looked, Anthony thought, as if he sought something and found it.

"It generally does trouble me in the morning. And, oh! my dear boy—your stairs!" exclaimed Bethune.

"It's awfully good of you to mount them to see me," said Anthony.

"You didn't think so just now," replied the newcomer, smiling.

And then Anthony told him the nature of the work which had absorbed his morning. Now this was not the first time that he had spoken to Bethune of his affairs.

"Why is it," he cried suddenly, breaking his narrative, "that I grow so criminally talkative in your company, Mr Bethune?"

"My dear boy," replied the visitor, in tones much gentler than his careless words, "you mustn't ask me difficult questions. A great many men have talked to me, and in only a very few of the interesting cases have I been able to discover why they talked."

"Do you mean—why they chose you to talk to, sir?" asked Anthony, with a smile.

"The correction may stand," replied Bethune. "Most of us must talk. It's the choice of me as accomplice that has puzzled me."

"Then I must put my question another way," said Anthony. "I am wondering why I told so much of my affairs to anyone. As you are the one, I thought perhaps you could explain me to myself, sir."

Bethune was amused, and indefinitely touched.

"To clear the ground," he said, "we must first know whether you had to talk to somebody."

"Certainly not," Anthony answered, "—not outside those who—who are inside."

"Then we must conclude that you felt inclined to chatter," said Bethune, "and I happened to be there."

"No," persisted Anthony. "But it's a fact that when you happen to be there, sir, I always feel inclined to chatter."

He sat upon a corner of a carpenter's bench and began filling his pipe.

"Now answer me a question," said Bethune. "Why do you say 'sir' to me?"

Anthony laughed.

"I was brought up rather quaintly," he said, "in the days of my petticoats. It was a woman taught me several things that seem strange now-a-days. And her teaching sticks, somehow. As you are neither the Prince of Wales nor quite a stranger, and I am not an American, I ought not, I suppose, to say 'sir' to you."

"Then why do you?" asked Bethune.

"Because the woman who made some of my petticoats and often tied 'em on, taught me to do it to a man that—who—oh, damn it all, sir!—one respected—admired—looked up to."

"Then," said Bethune, with inquiry, "I am respectable and admirable?"

Anthony was lighting his pipe.

"It's the logical inference," he admitted between the puffs. He disliked most expression of sentiment, but found it easy at this point to turn talk of himself aside with a reference to Lady Mary. He had found few to whom it gave him pleasure to speak of her. "She used to put reverence and truth next only to courage, sir. Gad, I remember funking once—and suddenly I saw a picture of her—inside my head, you know, and—"

Bethune was watching the boy's face through the smoke wreaths. The eyes were half closed, and he smiled at his memories.

"And—?" said Bethune.

"There was a row—an awful row afterwards," said Anthony, laughing. "And at eight years old I got a reputation quite undeserved for brutal and unnecessary ferocity."

"Your mother," said Bethune, "preached to purpose."

"My mother died before I was two. It was her sister who

brought me up—Lady Mary Frozier, whom you wouldn't come with me to see the other day, you know."

Then Bethune led the talk back towards its starting-place.

"It's not that I think this man hasn't got hold of a good thing," said Anthony, in reply to his question. "It's only that I have two doubts; one, whether it is as good as Forsberg thinks—as big an advance, I mean, as they believe; and the other—whether it's the last word in the matter for the next twenty years or so. It's that last word that I want."

"You want the impossible, my dear boy," said Bethune. "The older the world grows, the shorter the life of *last words*."

"That's why I said only twenty years," retorted Anthony. "Steam has lasted more than a century, and it's still doing most of the work."

"Electricity's no chicken," said Bethune.

"Bottled and portable electricity's hardly an egg—and I've got its nest ready, if we can find the hen. I want money, Mr Bethune, and therefore I want to be sure of twenty years and the last word."

"There aren't any," said Bethune, "—only long pauses in the conversation."

"I want the longest pause," said Anthony.

Until he spoke, they did not know that Forsberg was in the room.

"Positively," he said, "I have the hen. Comparatively, I have the last word. And amongst us we've got to find the superlative money, Le Dane."

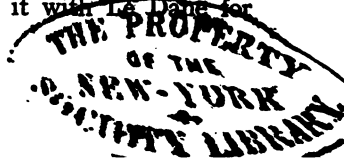
"I'll go," said Bethune, half rising.

But Forsberg laid a hand on his shoulder, and, with a gentleness which excused the familiarity, pressed him back into his seat.

"If you're not in a hurry, Mr Bethune," he said, "we'd like to have you stay. With all the world but you, Le Dane is the most reticent of mortals. But, if there's anything to give away, he's probably made you a present of it already; and I want to get your advice—and your support in revenge."

"Support?" said Anthony.

"Support against you," explained Forsberg. "To look at him, Mr Bethune, you'd think him a young man of enterprise. But you may take it from me that an old lady walking on the ice without her arctics isn't in it with Le Dane for caution."



"Never mind me," interrupted Anthony. "Tell us about this Frenchman of yours."

"He's not a Frenchman," answered Forsberg. "French Huguenot name, but as English as you are. His father was one of the last Spitalfields silk-weavers. I've been seeing something, yesterday and to-day, of what his accumulator can do. He's got an old ramshackle car down there, and he says he'll have her fitted up by to-morrow, and then he'll take us out and run her till she stops. And afterwards we can pull her to bits ourselves, if we like."

"That's good," said Anthony, "—as far as it goes."

"It'll go further than you begin to guess, Le Dane. But he makes very curious proposals as to terms," continued Forsberg. "He'll make it as easy as he can for us to gamble with his battery, if we'll undertake also to speculate in him."

"How's that?" asked Anthony.

"For the first ten years he'll be content with a very small royalty—"

"How much?"

Forsberg named a percentage which made Anthony open his eyes at the inventor's moderation.

"If—?" he said.

"If we will guarantee him four hundred a year for ten years. His story," said Forsberg, "is interesting. Three years ago Bedgold offered five thousand pounds for his secret—to buy it outright. All the prestige as well as the profit was to be Bedgold's. Delorme refused. To encourage him, his wife's father died and left him a little money; so, against a pretty tough combination of bad luck and bad health, he managed to struggle on. All these years he hasn't worried—neither he nor his wife. He's improved the battery—thirty per cent., he says. He showed me the Bedgold correspondence, and he's still proud of his refusal."

"I don't wonder," said Anthony; "that man's reputation is cannibal."

"All the same," continued Forsberg, "he says he's sorry now he didn't take the money. He's at the back end of his capital, and his wife's given him a new interest in things."

"What's that?" asked Bethune.

"Boy, I think," replied Forsberg. "And the man says the storage-battery is nothing to what he can do both in that line and others, now he's got this son to work for. But just as it will double his energy, so it will double his anxiety."

"And he wants us to keep the worry of butcher's bills off him for ten years," asked Anthony, "while he gaily goes on inventing? Well, I suppose we get first call on his future successes."

"That's it," cried Forsberg. "And when you've had that trip with his accumulators to drive you, and when you've seen something of the man, I believe you'll be as anxious as I am to keep the fellow in your pocket."

"It's odd—about the child making all that difference to the man," said Anthony.

"I guess it's common enough," Forsberg answered carelessly. "Primary instinct not yet quite eradicated by civilization. It's not interesting me much."

"It does me, rather," said Anthony. "Because every woman has, or is supposed to have, this protective passion which they call parental love. She generally knows and shows it on and off from her first doll upwards. And old maids know they have missed something. But a man seems to know nothing about it, till someone shows him a baby and tells him it is his. Then the feeling jumps on his neck, or takes him by the throat, and he can't think why he wants to make a fool of himself."

"How do you come by your knowledge?" asked Bethune.

"Second hand—if it is knowledge," replied the boy, smiling. "A Tyneside rivetter told me something like that—and another man. What do you think, Mr Bethune?"

"My judgment would depend as much on hearsay as your evidence," said Bethune. "But I think you are wrong on one point. Old bachelors sometimes have moments when they find life a bit of a frost, you know—from reasons not unlike those of your old maids."

"Aren't you offering evidence after all, Mr Bethune?" asked Forsberg.

"I'm afraid I was," admitted Bethune, laughing.

"And I'm afraid it's evidence I can't allow," said Anthony. "Mr Bethune's much too young to give it. But I'll offer you both something better than evidences of primæval instincts."

"What's that?" asked Forsberg.

"Lunch at the Four V.s," said Anthony. "That's the latest thing in clubs, sir," he explained. "At least I am on the original committee. It's the Four Universities Club. Nobody eligible but members of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard or Yale. There are clubs in New York, Boston, and

London, and they are very closely affiliated—in fact they are one institution. You may change the sky and run across the sea—you can even change your mind, and yet find your club the same. It's a good idea—I'm not quite sure whether it's a good club. But it has, in Sackville Street at least, a jolly good cook. Forsberg's a member."

But Forsberg would not join them. So Anthony took only Randolph Bethune out to lunch.

CHAPTER XII

THE BALL IS SET ROLLING

"THE club ought to succeed," said Anthony, as they sat down; "if only from its mixture. Sport, scholarship, law, journalism, drama, business, and even a dash of politics—and so far, a fairly representative selection. Of course there are one or two that ought never to have got in. But there was less knowledge than caution at the start, I'm afraid."

He ordered the lunch and chose the wine; and the pair, taking little interest in those eating at the tables about them, proceeded to enjoy the meal and each other's company.

The sympathy established so quickly was of different apparent origin in the two minds. Anthony could have told no more than that Bethune's personality appealed to him strongly, while he admired his record, delighted in his conversation, and agreed with many of his opinions.

With Bethune the case was less simple. To the keenness of Anthony's intelligence, the freshness of his youth, the simple charm of his good looks and perfect bearing, were added two further forces of attraction. And these the elder man's more reflective habit had attempted to define.

It was not Bethune's fault that his life had taught him to distrust the enthusiast. It was perhaps his merit that he could still believe in enthusiasm. And in Anthony he had found a man whose heart was the dwelling-place of an enthusiasm that was virgin. And this maiden passion, thought Bethune, would never cry itself on the pavements—would never unclasp the zone encircling its heavy vesture of reserve, until occasion should come like a bridegroom with promise of fruition.

And beyond this was yet another force drawing him to the lad. Anthony had reminded him, as has been suggested, of a face unseen and unforgotten for more than twenty years.

The likeness of one human countenance to another is among the commonest puzzles of life—even as it is one of the most evasive of life's mysteries. To the casual Western observer two Chinamen, separated by age, station, geography

and descent, are as twin brothers. And no two men, perhaps, are more unlike in the eyes of children and wives, than brothers of one birth; whom yet their outer ring of acquaintance will mistake for each other.

And it was while this middle-aged man and the young one ate their lunch together, taking in each other's company so much pleasure that neither knew what his food might be; and while one of them, in every mental pause was looking, not once nor twice only, for the likeness which he would find but to lose again, that the remarkable resemblance between the two dark, keen, aquiline faces, bent towards each other across the table, and silhouetted against the corner window of the club dining-room, was observed and discussed by four men, of whom three had never till now seen Randolph Bethune nor Anthony Le Dane.

At a square table in the middle of the room these four men sat. Three were young—young enough, at least, to be proud of eating publicly in company of the fourth. The fourth was older than he thought the three believed him. But they certainly gave him credit for seniority sufficient to leave hope to their vanity of being one day as wise in their generation as Alexander Beldover was generally accounted in his.

The healthy majority, indeed, of the new club, was disposed to dislike the man, whose knowledge of several worlds they held more amusing than respectable. That he had once been at Keble; that he had left it with great *éclat* of scholarship as well as some things less prized by that pious foundation; that he was an offshoot of a great house; that he wore good coats in a circle where good coats are necessary; that his name was not seldom chronicled in vulgar reports of gatherings in smart society, were things known. But that he lived by as well as in such dazzling company was suspected by only a few. Yet by many who had happily something more substantial than their own for support, Beldover was said to live by his wits.

It was, in fact, by playing service-pipe to the flow of scandal between the witless wantonness of one stratum of society and the thirsty ineptitude of three others that this remarkable man sometimes paid for the good coats which were the implements of his trade.

His betrayals of a clique which, foolish and unclean as it was, would, had it known its own use to him, have cast him out as uncleaner than itself, were discharged into a reservoir

not far from Ludgate Hill; and furnished employment to the satirical whips of frowzy Sunday Juvenals and flippant Saturday Jeremiahs.

Down there, however, near the City, his name was not Beldover.

But, even upon its title-page, he confessed to the authorship of a clever, scurrilous, and peculiarly rancid novel, which had leapt into vogue within a fortnight of publication. Good, bad, and indifferent conspired to swell its astonishing sales. The good advertised it with their execrations; the bad had furnished it with types whose personality was scarcely veiled; and for both these reasons the indifferent read the book with voracity.

By the people whose words, deeds and manners he had with cynical treachery translated to its pages, Beldover had been neither cut nor kicked. For amongst the most notorious of his models were two of wit sufficient to refuse the cap of self-accusation, and of rank so exalted that their example ensured imitation.

"If they don't," said many smaller fry, "why the devil should I care?"

So the author of *Hell's Delight* went his ways, private and public, rejoicing.

Now this afternoon Alexander Beldover sat at the central table with his back to the corner window. And the youngster opposite to him had a good view of the two men sitting there.

The other three had carried the talk into a region which happily had little interest for him, and during many minutes Alfred Corell languidly watched Bethune and Le Dane. And then, suddenly,

"I wish, Beldover," he said, leaning forward and speaking low, "you'd tell me who those two men are, lunching in the corner."

Beldover was too old a bird to turn his head in a hurry

"The table in the south window?" he asked.

Alfred Corell nodded.

"I'll tell you in a moment, if I can."

A waiter passing, Beldover followed him with his eye, as if wishing to attract his attention. Having thus brought his gaze to the desired point, he turned at once, with apparent surprise at finding their own waiter changing the plates.

"The man on the left," he said, "is Bethune—*The Mail* calls him the 'Great Chinaman.'"

"Then the other must be his son," said Corell, "—or his little brother. Never saw two men more alike in my life."

"Didn't get him," said Beldover. "Never heard he had either. But that's nothing. Wait a minute."

And when he had eaten awhile, he turned his head again with much appearance of unconcern.

"Good God!" he cried softly, coming back to his food. "You're right as to the likeness, Corell. It's astounding. But you're wrong about the relation. Bethune's not married."

Mr Alfred Corell smiled, and felt sure he was going to say something good.

"I thought you were the lucky man," he drawled, "who wrote *Hell's Delight*?"

The two other young ones laughed. Even Beldover smiled approval.

"But it won't do, Corell," he said. "I know the other man too."

"Who is he?" asked Hackney Fyson; he sat on Beldover's left, and was nearest him in years.

Beldover controlled a grimace of distaste.

"Le Dane—engineer—nephew of Lord Ingestow—son of Lady Blanche and Colonel Le Dane. He's on the committee."

"I've never seen him here," said Arthur Wringfield: he sat on Beldover's right.

"Always out of town," said Beldover.

"Where does the likeness come from?" asked Wringfield; for both he and Hackney Fyson could see Anthony's table, without recourse to Beldover's devices.

"It isn't only their faces," said Hackney Fyson. "It's a pity you can't watch 'em, Beldover, without twisting your neck and looking silly. They handle their knives and forks and lift their glasses as if they'd been cut from the same pattern. They belong, somehow."

Wringfield repeated his question. "Where does it come from?" he demanded rhetorically.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Beldover. "Ask Him."

Corell had brought off his *bon mot*; Wringfield felt it was now his turn.

"Lady—Lady Blanche," he said, "might be able to explain."

"While Lady Blanche could," replied Beldover, "she wouldn't. If she's willing now, she can't."

"Why?" asked Fyson.

"She continues dead these twenty years," said Beldover.

"Then perhaps," cried Corell, "the Great Chinaman could tell us."

"I'd be sorry for the man that asked him," said Hackney Fyson, who had been watching the table in the south window, "—whether he knows or not."

"After all," said Wringfield, "it's rather rot. Any two men may happen to look alike."

Corell had set the ball rolling, and did not wish to be deprived of his lead or his subject.

"It's the kind of likeness that men give to their accidental rather than to their necessary offspring," he said sententiously; and so succeeded in keeping the ball from slipping over the edge of oblivion.

"You believe in the superstition of the love-child—its health, strength, beauty, and so on?" asked Beldover.

"I can't help believing," said Corell, very sage of countenance.

"But I didn't know he was famous for his greater resemblance to his parents," said Beldover.

"He has it—whether he's famous for it or not," replied Corell. "I'll tell you a story."

He told it—a story which had no weight but the conviction which its solitary evidence carried to the mind of the teller; a story without merit or decency.

Meantime Beldover had looked behind him once or twice with less caution than at first.

For in this one morning he had received news from his publishers good even beyond his expectations; and also a bundle of notices from a press-cutting agency. Some ten or fifteen in number, they differed in little but their choice of abusive epithets for the author and the matter of *Hell's Delight*. The wine, too, was good, or he would have been more sparing of it; and he sat among flatterers. It is therefore not surprising that Beldover was happy. And it was only when Beldover was happy that he forgot his caution.

"There's a man at that middle table keeps turning to look at us," said Bethune.

Anthony smiled.

"You must expect to be stared at," he replied. "You're supposed to like it, you know."

Bethune shrugged his shoulders.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"The man with his back to us? He's called Beldover—no credit to the club, I'm afraid," Anthony answered; and gave some account of the man he disliked and his book that he had not read.

These two had aroused by their likeness more curiosity in Beldover than he allowed the men at his table to perceive. He waited until Anthony and Bethune left the dining-room; then, getting free from his satellites, he walked through the Strand to Fleet Street. On his way he turned into Somerset House and found out some things that he wanted to know. Feeling blindly after more knowledge of the only kind he cared for, he continued his walk eastward, and was soon closeted with a hoary journalist of wonderful memory and great capacity for whisky. From this man his gleanings were better than he had dared to expect.

Anthony was not peculiar in his dislike of Alexander Beldover. But Beldover was almost alone in his hatred of Anthony Le Dane. Hitherto he had found no evil to whisper nor even to chew upon in secret against the man he had called prig, while groaning inwardly that this should be the worst word which he could fling with any colour in it of plausibility.

But now he thought there might be found (with a little more of such luck as he had had to-day) a worse, or, at least, a more painful epithet which could be some day whispered to sting.

And so, because he loved the discovery even more than the knowledge of evil, and because he was very far from loving Anthony Le Dane, Beldover became a power in Anthony's story.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BALL ROLLS

THE facts which Beldover discovered, though not all in one afternoon, were these:—that Anthony Le Dane was born on the twenty-ninth of February in the year 1881; that Colonel Le Dane had died in the August of 1880; that Lady Blanche Le Dane had spent the winter and spring of that year 1880 in a hired villa upon the Eastern Italian Riviera. The name of the little town was Porto Finaggio, a place of great seclusion, left out at sea, as it were, by the railway and the Cornice Road, and joined with the neighbouring towns by nothing better than mule-tracks. From the hoary journalist, moreover, he picked up a thread leading to a discovery which gave weight to all the others: which was, that *The Illustrated Examiner*, a paper now defunct, had in the summer of 1880 sent Randolph Bethune to South Africa as war correspondent and black-and-white artist. He was remembered because of his present fame and because of the commotion which his telegrams and letters had occasioned both before and after Majuba. And one of those who remembered these things spoke casually of the trouble they had had to get the man when they wanted him.

He had been wandering afoot in strange shoes, when he had any, and afloat in stranger craft for almost a year, in the by-ways and obscure places of the Mediterranean; and had turned up at last in the little Riviera town of Santa Caterina, which he had not seemed so willing to leave as most men would have been at the prospect of good work.

When he heard this, Beldover went home, took down an atlas, and found that Santa Caterina lay at once upon the sea and the railway, some forty miles to the west of Spezzia, and four to the east and north of Porto Finaggio. He had learned, moreover, that it was upon or about the first day of June in 1880, that Randolph Bethune had reached the office of *The Illustrated Examiner*, having left Santa Caterina and his aimless wanderings in response to a telegraphic ultimatum from the editor.

Beldover sat down and thought about it all. Were there any means by which these things could be made of solid use to him? If he could find such means, he would hold his tongue; but if not—there was at least his malice to gratify. And there were Corell, Wringfield, and a score of others who could be trusted to spread what he should tell under pledge of discretion. He could do it, and keep himself out of it. But it needed consideration.

One evening, it being now the third since Bethune had lunched at the Four V.s with Anthony, Beldover was playing bridge in the same club, and still considering. He was in such matters no dog in the manger; but was always ready to give to a hungry world any hint of scandal which he could not use to fill his own pockets. His newest collection, he was now clearly sure, was not of the lucrative kind; but he had not yet begun to share it, waiting for an opening not of his own making.

The need of another player arising, an American of the party introduced Axel Forsberg into the game, and to Beldover.

It was already fate, and an hour saw the end of the play. Bleecker, who had known Forsberg at Harvard, was talking with him, a little apart from the others, when somebody mentioned Randolph Bethune.

"I see the great book's to be out soon," said another.

"It seems no more than two weeks since the papers trumpeted his return to London," remarked Bleecker. "He must have hustled over the writing of it."

"It's longer than that," replied Beldover. "And they say he spent three months in Italy, doing nothing else."

Bleecker had lost money that evening, playing a game which he did not enjoy. Yet he was in very good humour, knowing he could say he had played bridge with the author of *Hell's Delight*. For he took interest in the smaller characteristics and trivial habits of the celebrated, and prided himself much on the acquaintance of men who wrote books, mistaking these harmless tastes for love of letters.

"I'd like to know what place he hid himself in," he said, rather eagerly.

"Why?" asked Forsberg.

"I—er—well, you see—" began Bleecker.

But Beldover interrupted.

"I think it's easy to guess why," he said with smooth

kindliness; and Forsberg's eye turned upon him at the first sound of his voice. "We all hope in some apparently insignificant detail of a great man's tastes or habits to catch a clue to the secret of his greatness. A new authenticated anecdote of Shakespeare would interest millions—a newly discovered play would be read at most by hundreds and enjoyed by tens."

Forsberg, still with his eye upon the last speaker, wondered why he watched the man; and also, why he was himself willing to satisfy his countryman's cheap curiosity.

"You won't learn Bethune's secret from it, Bleecker," he said; "but I can tell you where he wrote his book."

Bleecker begged to be told. Beldover's face was almost impassive; but Forsberg, when he saw its eyes hopeful, knew that the mouth had been for a flash of time expectant. He did not know why the man wanted to know; he believed the man could learn the same thing elsewhere; and he wanted to see how the eyes and the mouth of the man would receive the information.

"At a little place on the coast between Genoa and Spezzia," he said to Bleecker. "It's called Porto Finaggio."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he felt he had committed an indiscretion. Beldover was vaguely displeasing to him; and in spite of what Beldover believed his own perfect self-control, it was plain to Forsberg that the information he had given was no less gratifying to Beldover than to the Bostonian of literary tastes.

"How d'you know?" asked Bleecker.

"He told me himself," said Forsberg; and left the club without getting rid of his fellow-countryman. This was only done at the corner of Dover Street and Piccadilly. And even then the separation was not final. For, as Rodman Bleecker padded carefully and contentedly northward toward his select and expensive hotel, Forsberg overtook him with such silence and swiftness, and laid a hand upon his shoulder with so much friendly weight that the little man jumped, and was glad to find himself too game to cry out either in his alarm or his relief.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" was all he said.

Forsberg looked down at him kindly.

"Didn't mean to rattle you," he said. "But I thought of something."

"Yes?"

"Providence did well by you, Roddy, in giving your folks money. You never had much head, had you?"

"No—not much," admitted Bleecker modestly, adding, more cheerfully: "But I've more than I had in the old days when you tried to make a quarter-back of me, Axel."

"That's good—very good," said Axel, seriously. "Beldover isn't good for you, Roddy, my son—that's all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bleecker.

"Have you read *Hell's Delight*?"

"Not yet," admitted Bleecker. "But I'm going to. Have you?"

"Not a line," said Forsberg, unabashed. "You read it, and come and tell me all about the dirty thing."

He made an appointment to dine with this old admirer, and left him with a final caution against Beldover.

"Don't cut the man, but keep an eye peeled, and never believe what he tells you. 'Night."

And Roddy Bleecker, being an undergraduate to his death, glowed with pride in Forsberg's acquaintance. He fluttered delicately to bed, and slept well in dreams of other men's greatness.

But his friend was troubled.

He had seen the twitch of a bad man's mouth, and a gleam of his eye. He did not know that any ball of scandal was rolling; but he had an uneasy feeling that he himself in the first place, if roll it did, had set it moving. He had seen Beldover's face: he knew that Bethune and Anthony had lunched two days ago at the club he had just left: he knew—who better?—their astonishing likeness to each other; and, absurd as the whole thing seemed to sober and limited reason, he feared in his heart that, in forcing together these two men, he had played with fire.

If he had heard the conversation which followed his exit from the card-room, he would have felt certainty in place of fear.

Beldover spoke casually of Bethune. The man left alone with him seemed interested.

"I saw him at lunch here the other day," he said. "He was with Le Dane. How extraordinarily alike they are!"

"Do you think so?" asked Beldover, with carelessness which he intended should seem studied.

"Yes," replied the other, bluntly. "And I wasn't the only one."

"That's odd," said Beldover, musingly, "—very curious indeed;" and became mysteriously reticent.

But on his solitary way to his flat he was almost guilty of talking aloud to himself.

"Comes back to Porto Finaggio after twenty-four years to write his damned book there, does he? Well, I suppose some men are like that—even after eight in Thibet."

For the next few days, in many places and companies, he watched the progress of his rolling ball. Often he prepared for it planes adroitly inclined—and now and again would give it fresh impulse delicately applied.

The facts which he had pieced together were dropped here and there, one in this ear, another in that, with much judgment. And when two or three pairs of such ears were gathered together with tongues to match, it was found that these facts fitted like the stray bits of a child's puzzle, offering yet further fantastic curves suggestive of shapes which should fit again with their outer edges. And in these processes of fitting and suggestion the gossips, not merely of the clubs, were so much interested that nearly every one of them forgot by whom the puzzle-sections had been let fall for their use.

Forsberg's forebodings had been more prophetic than is frequent with the unimaginative.

It was very certainly with fire that he had played.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STORAGE-BATTERY

DURING the next few days, in intervals of his own and Anthony's affairs, Axel Forsberg came now and again across a sign that things were going wrong even as he had expected; that men here and there were amusing themselves with detraction of the dead as well as of the living. Here a frayed edge of conversation would reach him; there, an allusion or a wink too intangible to resent where resentment must convict of comprehension. And, though he was chafed, he could not in honesty blame as much as his loyal temper disposed him. For the two men whose faces were the cause of it all were each of the kind that looks in a glass and straightway forgets what manner of man he is. The attention of neither being called to the likeness, there was in neither any reluctance of appearing together. The friendship ripened, and they were seen often in company.

It was the less strange, perhaps, that Anthony should be among the last to know how often his name and appearance were upon the lips of the curious, that he had, in pursuance of his intention expressed to Lady Mary, spent in the company of Elmira Corder every half-hour he could spare of his evenings.

On the fourth morning after Forsberg had played bridge at the Four V.s, there came to the end of the narrow court leading to the door of Anthony's stairway a car driven by an electric motor. This car as it came groaned and rattled and squealed in various parts of its old-fashioned and debauched mechanism. It was also shameful to look upon. What showed was filthy; and how should any but the initiated know that what mattered was mended, cleaned and oiled to the pitch of possible finish? When he came face to face with the thing, even Anthony, for all his knowledge, laughed aloud.

Bethune, whose leg was that morning worse than usual, leaned on the laugher's arm.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"She looks so forlorn," said the boy.

From the forlorn engine Delorme alighted, and Axel Forsberg, on time, as he said, to the minute, dropped in their midst from the footboard of an omnibus. He nodded to Bethune and Anthony, and turned at once to the son of the Spitalfields silk-weaver.

"Brought her from Hackney all alone?" he asked.

The descendant of Huguenots looked at him calmly out of his fat little English face.

"She brought me," he answered. "I didn't know you wanted anyone else."

"I'd have brought a boy along—and a dust-pan in case of accident—that's all," said Forsberg. "Let's get a move on."

"Come with us, Mr Bethune," said Anthony. "There's lots of room."

"I thought you said three, Mr Forsberg," objected Delorme, making no attempt to conceal his anxiety. But Forsberg had seen the acquiescence on the elder and the affectionate hospitality on the younger of the two faces which were giving him so much uneasiness, and became disingenuous.

"Well," he said, "there are three of us."

"I thought I was the third," explained Delorme.

"Are you afraid of the machine?" asked Anthony.

"We're here to try my storage—and that's right," replied Delorme. "But the car's rotten. She's all I could run to, and I've done my best with her." He hesitated a moment, and then plunged. "All right, gentlemen," he cried, "we'll let her carry the four. Understand, though, that whatever she does might be doubled by a good machine, and that the fourth man may be the camel's straw."

Bethune would have left them, but Anthony prevailed.

"When the camel's back doesn't break," he said, "we know the straw is not final."

And so the decrepit car groaned its way out of London with a full load.

Driving through Highgate, Delorme turned to Forsberg.

"I hope you gentlemen have money with you," he said.

"When she runs down, or if she breaks down, you'll have to get home."

"I guess we've got enough for as far as this scrap-heap sewing-machine will take us. But it's not the square thing to your invention, Delorme."

"If she busts," said Delorme, placidly, "there's nothing proved. If she holds, her badness is on my side."

They went along at a good pace past Muswell Hill, and were drawing near Finchley, when they overtook a man and a woman, mounted on very good-looking hacks. The lady's horse shied with some violence, and Delorme brought the car to a stand with a jar of mechanical protest which for the moment increased the animal's hysterical misbehaviour. But the rider had better nerve than the ridden, and had brought him to a quivering standstill facing the car almost before Anthony knew that the firm seat, steady hand and straight back he had been admiring belonged to Elmira Corder. Their eyes met as he raised his cap, and Elmira showed pink from collar to curls.

Lord Ingestow's voice on the other side made Anthony turn his head.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Corder," he was saying.

"Why?" asked the girl.

"Because I told you the animal would face anything that runs on roads."

"It doesn't matter," said Elmira. "I like it."

"But I didn't expect— Hullo! That you, Le Dane?" cried Ingestow.

Anthony nodded.

"Then I don't mind finishing what I began to say. I never expected anything so bad as that car you're riding in."

"Don't blame me nor Forsberg," said Anthony, laughing. "This is a curiosity belonging to Mr Delorme, our friend here. He's lent it to us for the day."

"Where are you going?" asked Elmira

She had coaxed her horse's nose within snuffing distance of the car, and had forgotten everything in staring at Randolph Bethune. Anthony's gaze had fallen back to her as he finished speaking to Ingestow, and she asked her question because she felt the sudden need of speech to cover her astonishment.

"If Mr Delorme's car takes us as far as he expects," replied Anthony, "it will be the beginning of a long journey together for three of us."

Ingestow had recognised Anthony's companion in the back seat.

"That sounds a bit gruesome, Le Dane," he said. "And I'd like to know which life you're going to save. But I wish you'd introduce me to Mr Bethune."

Anthony did as he was asked, and got out to stretch his

legs, he said. He stood a while at Elmira's stirrup, and thought, as he talked with her, that he had never seen her lovelier than now. The exercise which had heightened her colour seemed also to have softened her eyes. And, indeed, given a good seat and a well fitted habit, there are few positions more becoming to a woman than this of the saddle; whence she may look down in safety into an upturned face with any shade of womanly feeling which it suits her designs or her heart to display; her own countenance mysteriously gilded and softened at once by the nimbus as of divinity enclining even more than the ear.

Soon they separated, the car hurrying on its garrulous way northward.

"One of Mr Le Dane's inventions, I suppose," said the girl. "It's an awful thing to be seen in."

"It's the power, not the machine, they're experimenting with, most likely," replied Ingestow, speaking as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

"I think we'd better be getting back," said Elmira; and they turned their horses' heads homeward. After a few minutes' silence,

"Is he a visionary, or a practical man?" she asked.

"The best way to answer that question," he said, "would be to stop and telephone for my Panhard, and pursue them. By the look of the party I should say they think they've got track of a good thing, and are going out to see if they can find it."

"Who was that sitting with Mr Le Dane?" was her next question.

"Randolph Bethune," said Ingestow.

"It's very strange, isn't it?" asked the girl.

"What's strange?" asked the man.

"The likeness between them—between Mr Le Dane and Mr Bethune, I mean," said the girl.

Now Lord Ingestow, though this resemblance had struck him for the first time almost in the same moment as his companion, did not feel disposed to admit the likeness. If the likeness must be granted, nothing should make him call it more than superficial and accidental.

It is not probable that he asked himself the reason of this reluctance. It was not his habit to take much interest in his own motives. But the thing had leapt to his eyes so forcibly that he wondered why it had never struck him till he saw the men together; and it gave him a vague discomfort.

Having much experience where Anthony had none, Ingestow had no hesitation in admitting himself in love with Miss Corder. But he had not made up his mind as to the strength or the probable future of the new sentiment, and did not intend at present to discuss with Elmira a matter which concerned his family and had but that minute been thrust upon his notice.

"I suppose," he said, with reserve offering no pretence of candour to make it palatable, "—I suppose there is a superficial sort of likeness. Those things occur too often to interest me much."

"You don't mean—" began Elmira, and broke off.

"Some people have eyes only for resemblance," said Ingestow, "where others see nothing but differences."

"Oh, yes," said Elmira.

"It's all in the way you look at things," he continued.

Elmira pushed her horse to a narrow strip of firm turf by the roadside. She was annoyed, and feared her mouth would look "a mere gash," till she felt better.

"Of course," she said, "that is so. I look on 'this ribbon of grass as much better than macadam. So does Cock-a-doodle."

"We'll let 'em out a bit," said Ingestow; and Elmira took care to let Cock-a-doodle out with a good lead, so that when the canter ended with the grass, she had a few seconds in which to arrange a loose curl as well as her mouth.

When Ingestow came up, her pretty teeth shone at him between lips curved into a charming smile; and none could have guessed that she had endured the thing which she hated most of all things—being snubbed by an Englishman.

All the way back Ingestow found her more than good company; so that he was once or twice during the rest of his day troubled unwontedly in his conscience; and before he slept, resolved to see his sister Mary as soon as there was nothing else to do.

Mr Schomberg Delorme's faith in his method of electrical storage, and his ability as a practical mechanic were vindicated in the same hour. And that hour was 3.57 a.m. by the clock in the hall of his little house in Hackney; to which, but only for the last quarter-mile, the "scrap-heap sewing-machine" was thrust by six weary legs and as many arms, while the wearier Bethune slept in his seat.

For after they had run northward so far that Anthony and Forsberg desired no further proof, Delorme had spoken,

"I think, gentlemen," he said, "that there's almost enough left to get us home."

"If it does—" said Anthony; and his aposiopesis made a glad heart beat where the containing walls were unused to the measure.

Arrived, Delorme beat upon the door. His continued existence depended, amongst other things, upon accuracy of detail and a strictly ordered memory. So of course he had forgotten his latch-key.

While he knocked, Anthony waked Bethune, who was vexed by the sloth into which they had tricked him.

And then the door was opened by Mrs Delorme with a bedroom candle and a nightgown for all adornment. While she thought him alone, she embraced her husband, but when she caught sight of the short hedge of white faces behind him, she fled, with the squeak of local propriety, shedding slippers on the way to her dressing-gown.

Hardly, however, had Delorme lit the gas in the parlour before the best dressing-gown was with them; and Mrs Delorme, safe in its unflattering folds, loaded the table with bread, salt butter, a heel of red-coated cheese, a plate of apples, a stump of cold mutton, and a half-empty whisky bottle, with much beer in a jug. And they ate and drank till the bones glistened and the rind was but redness; till the crusts had vanished, and the bottle was dry as the jug. Delorme slept in his share of a bed, but the others on sofa, chairs and hearth-rug, till Mrs Delorme told them it was day. This was not, by the customs of Hackney, to be accounted early. For Mrs Delorme, before calling her sudden guests, had two cares: a good breakfast and her best dress. Her best, that is, for morning wear. And, oh! how she did wish she could wear the one evening frock that had never a chance of wearing out! This being impossible, she thanked Heaven for the heat of the weather and the clean white linen skirt, which, with a soft-fronted shirt of Schomberg's, made her look so fresh and jolly.

The beer and cold mutton at four had been good; but the eggs, bacon, coffee and toast at half-past ten were better.

When the infant Schomberg had been admired, and the coffee finished to its fundamental thickness, a hansom was found, and the visitors hastened towards completer toilet. Forsberg told Anthony that no further tests need delay them, and Anthony agreed. Bethune listened almost without hear-

ing. He had known as much before he fell asleep last night in the car—known it, not because he knew machines, but because men, to his eyes, had long been the clearest printed books.

"We've got hold of the thin end of a big stick, Mr Bethune," said Forsberg, in a moment's joyous expansion. "How shall we fill in the day?"

"I should prescribe," said Bethune, "Turkish bath, lunch at Verrey's, and then your lawyers."

"I haven't lunched at Verrey's," said Axel.

"I have never bathed Turkishly," said Anthony.

"For nearly fifty years I've done without a lawyer," said Bethune. "But in your case he is necessary. So my advice is good. The bath promotes reflection and naked humility; Verrey's, good temper and hope. And I can enjoy both without the expense of wasting them on a lawyer afterwards."

"All right," said Anthony. "Only I want the evening for myself."

And Bethune knew that he wanted the evening to call upon the American girl who had handled her horse so well.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIRD IN HAND

INGESTOW, as has been said, found pleasure in Elmira's company even to her brother's door. And this, perhaps, was why the next evening he called upon Harriet after dinner—and why Harriet, who was fond of Anthony Le Dane, contrived plausible desertion of the drawing-room.

Anthony, by one chance and another, did not get to Lad-broke Square till Ingestow had left it. Elmira was radiant. It was her experience that one man would put her in excellent form and humour for the next, and she had been known to admit that two admirers were more easily handled than one. And these two, uncle and nephew, offered a not uninteresting contrast. Anthony would propose marriage when she should please to let him; but she had not been able to make up her mind that he was in love with her. Now, that Ingestow was in love she made no sort of doubt; but this, in his case, was the extent of her assurance. Like many women of cold nature, Elmira took pleasure in arousing and observing the symptoms of a passion whose voice hitherto had never in her own heart been answered by more than a rather hollow echo. And on this side, at least, Anthony's chances were the better; for something in the boy had provoked in her a feeling which she diagnosed as the beginning of love. Just before he came in this evening, she had told herself that, if Anthony Le Dane were in his uncle's shoes, she would count herself as good as settled. But Ingestow was Ingestow, and a haze of prudential proverbs hovered in her head. As she gave him her hand, however, Elmira thought that Anthony was surely the bird that she held, and without possibility of denial a prettier bird than any in her bush.

"I know it's too late to call," he said.

"Then why did you come?" asked Elmira.

"Because I wanted to be sure you got home safe yesterday," he answered.

Elmira laughed.

"My saddle's not a milk-pail, to be emptied with a kick," she said.

"I could see that," he replied. "But, not knowing the horse, I ought to be forgiven if I was a little anxious."

"Who's to do the forgiving?" asked the girl.

"You," said Anthony. "You would, if you knew how much I care."

"That's very sweet of you," said Miss Corder. "But I don't think you need any forgiving for being nice. Now, I'd just love to have you tell me why you were in that dreadful old car, and whether it had anything to do with the things you have told me about."

For Elmira was nationally disposed to believe that a man may become rich in a night, and desired as much for Anthony.

But he seemed less willing than usual to talk of his plans. After she had pumped him awhile in vain,

"You see," he said, "it was my affair only, when I talked before. Now it's several other people's as well. But I do believe it's going to be all right."

From this she knew that things were going well with the storage of electric force, or with some other mystery of at least equal importance to her future. So she smiled upon him, and felt, with a pang of self-satisfaction, how really fond of him she was. It would seem, indeed, that by face and manner, if not in words, she managed to tell him so much. For Anthony's simple nature, with the help of his slender stock of vanity, experienced a thrill that tempted him into something like ardour. And certainly the face that was bending towards him might have given excuse to sophisticated middle-age.

"I want to tell you something," he said. "To tell you lots of things."

"That," said Elmira, "is just what I've been trying to make you do."

And her beauty took a deeper tone, in which reproach was blended with expectancy.

"Something about me, I mean," said Anthony, "—not the business."

Miss Corder was hurt.

"You don't suppose," she cried, "that I cared about the business for any sake but yours—for any reason but that you have your heart in it—you, who have been so kind and friendly to me, almost ever since I came over?"

"If that was why you were interested," said Anthony, "I don't feel so much afraid of changing the subject."

"Why not?" asked Elmira.

"Because I'm going to talk of how good you've been to me," he replied; "and of how much kinder still I want you to be."

She gazed at him with wide-open eyes, an image of affectionate surprise.

"Of course I will, Anthony," she answered, "if you'll tell me how."

At some length he told her. When he came to an end, she sat without speaking, her eyes shaded by the fingers of one beautiful hand.

"You might say something," he exclaimed at last.

Her first words were entirely sincere.

"Dear Anthony," she said, "I do really like you—you know that much, don't you?"

In the air of her concession Anthony detected reservation.

"I didn't know it," he said. "I only hoped you did. But I hoped a great deal more."

"Yes—you told me," replied Elmira, tenderly. "And it's the *more* we've got to talk about, I'm afraid."

"Yes," said Anthony, "but I'm glad—not afraid."

"I said *afraid*," explained Elmira, "because I don't want to hurt you."

"Oh, I'm pretty tough," he answered, speaking bitterly, and feeling not a little heroic.

Now this was the kind of thing which made Miss Corder feel herself justly valued, and caused her beauty to glow softer and richer with each sigh of her Tantalus.

"You do make it hard for me," she exclaimed, with rising colour.

"I make it easy," said Anthony. "You are going to say 'No.' Say it quick—that's all I'm asking."

With delicate archness she asked if he were really in a hurry for that negative.

"Yes, I am," cried Anthony, bluntly. "You're growing prettier every minute, and I can't stand it much longer. I'd rather get it over."

"Then I'm afraid—" she began; but hesitated, and was silent, with eyes down-cast; her bosom rose and fell with quickened rhythm beneath the lace which framed her perfectly modelled throat of exquisite texture and whiteness.

"Go on," said Anthony.

"It was only to ask you to wait a little while."

Anthony caught his breath and interrupted her.

"For you?" he asked.

"For my answer," said Elmira.

"Of course I will," he replied more cheerfully. "All the more willingly for seeing that it isn't likely to make things worse for me, and might—just *might*, you know—make them better. But why were you afraid to ask me that?"

"I didn't want you to insist on my saying one thing or the other positively—to-night." And when she saw he would ask further explanation, she volunteered it. "I mean, Anthony," she said, glancing up at him with a small laugh which he found wholly adorable, "that I'm so fond of you that I didn't want to say 'no,' which is all you'd get to-night."

"But if you're fond of me—" began Anthony, with more heat than he had yet shown; for he warmed to the game.

Elmira interrupted him with a finger laid delicately upon his lips.

"Hush," she said. "I want to explain and confess at the same time. I've got so used to your coming here—I've got so used to you, Anthony, that I do believe I'd miss you just awfully if you didn't come any more. But I don't know one little tiny bit what sort of feeling it is I have for you. I haven't thought about it, much less worried over it. I do know that I don't want to lose you, but I'm not at all sure that I want more of you than I have already."

"You say you never thought of it," remarked Anthony, with unexpected acuteness. "But you must have known that I had, or you couldn't have stopped me so often and so cleverly."

"That ought to show you the perfectly transparent truth of what I've just told you," answered Elmira, readily. "I instinctively tried to keep you off a line where I felt, without any thinking, that there was trouble ahead. And I can assure you, Mr Le Dane," she added, with a pretty touch of mock modesty that made him laugh just as she wished him to laugh, "that a woman can often tell more of a man's feelings for her than of her own for him."

Anthony suppressed the obvious comment, telling himself it would be unkind.

"When am I to know?" he asked.

For a moment Elmira seemed to reflect.

"If you'll let me alone for a week—" and here, expecting to see the boy wince, she hit upon a parenthesis almost as truthful as it was neat—"though I warn you I shall hate you at first for doing what I ask you to do—if you will keep away

from us for a week, Anthony, and not write, I believe I shall know by the end of it what I really want. I have a silly kind of mind, I guess, to make all this fuss and not know its own state. But it's a big thing you are offering me, and, if we were to settle things in a hurry, you might find I'd given you a two-cent cookie instead of the loaf you want." Then, with a touch of feeling more genuine than she knew it, and almost as genuine as Anthony thought it, she added: "And I shouldn't like you ever to call my—my half-penny bun a stone."

He took her at her word a little more readily than she had wished.

There were, indeed, several reasons why that week apart was desirable, but none, that she could see, why he should concede it without objection.

"Very well," he said, rising. "Then I'll go. It'll seem an awful long time, you know."

However Anthony's alacrity may have jarred upon her artistic sense, or upon something softer, the entrance of Mrs Corder at this moment secured him Elmira's unspoken pardon. For she thought he had heard Harriet's approach.

"I'm just off," he said. "Don't scold me. I know it's wickedly late."

When he left the room, Harriet felt at last that the spirit moved her, and she opened her mouth to speak. And for the peace of the household it was well that a spirit, perhaps not the same, moved Elmira more quickly.

"Oh, I forgot," she cried, and sped to the door and half down the first flight of the stairs with a smooth, gliding action of astonishing swiftness. Leaning over the balusters,

"Anthony!" she called softly. "Anthony!"

Two long upward strides brought him to a point immediately beneath her.

"Well?" he said, looking up in her face; and as their eyes met he remembered how the day before she had looked down on him from her horse.

And even as she spoke to him softly, knowing that she had left the door of Harriet's drawing-room wide-open above, his upturned face brought to her mind the same memory. Suddenly then she recalled the face of the man who had sat beside him in the back seat of the shabby car.

"Good-bye, dear," she said, "for a week. You won't worry, will you? Promise?"

And she stretched down her hand, leaning further towards him, with gesture as gracious as her face was beautiful.

Anthony took the hand in his and kissed the fingers. His moustache brushed them, and she thought again of that other face whose shaven lip, with the surrounding lines of years and suffering, had seemed alone to distinguish it from the face she was now looking down upon.

Though Anthony still clung to the tips of her fingers, reluctant to say good-bye, Elmira let the rail take the weight of her leaning body, stretched down her other hand, and rubbed the knuckles of her right where he had kissed them. Anthony let go; and at his look of surprise she laughed softly.

"I wasn't rubbing out *that*," she whispered. "Your moustache tickled my fingers—that's all."

"I'll cut it off," he responded gaily, "on the chance of being allowed to kiss your hand next time I see you."

"It's an awful risk," retorted Elmira.

"If the sacrifice fails to propitiate," said Anthony, "I'll say it's my way of going into mourning, like the people who shave their heads."

Elmira leaned forward again, both hands grasping the rail of the balustrade and her bosom pressing it between them.

"It's an awfully fancy little ornament," she said. "And it'd be a pity, perhaps, to cut it off. But I've had a notion for a long time that I'd like to see you without it. I believe you don't have the least idea how handsome you are. You started the subject yourself," she continued, "so I don't have any hesitation in telling you that, if you do—" and here she made a little waving motion to represent one handling a razor—"if you do, it won't hurt anything but the moustache."

Then she who had never feared woman, cast an apprehensive eye up the stairs.

"The *belle sœur* is fidgetting with her heels," she said. "I must go."

"Why?" asked Anthony.

"Because she's my stable companion," said the girl.

"I mean, why should she fidget," explained the boy.

"If I say—if I say next week what you want me to say, Anthony," she answered, already, as it seemed to him, upon the wing, with one hand lifting the front of her skirt, the other pushed for a grasp far up the rail, and her glowing face turned downwards to him over the smooth whiteness of the upper

arm, "—if I did, she'd sit up nights for fear she might forgive me in her sleep."

Elmira reached the drawing-room flushed, happy, and glorious of countenance. For there was in her heart a flutter of real affection, and in her mind the excitement of the game she played best.

Harriet was not fidgetting. She sat reading. But still upon the tip of her tongue were the words which Elmira's sudden flight had baulked. When, however, she saw that young woman in the full radiance of her return, discretion, if not despair, closed her mouth once again.

After three commonplace remarks, Elmira yawned openly, and said she would go to bed. The click of Sigismund's latch-key was heard, and the women separated with a kiss of little appetite. Elmira met her brother at the head of the stairs.

"You look very beautiful to-night, Sis," he said, gazing in admiration.

"Don't I all the time?" asked Elmira.

"It's got an extra polish on it to-night," replied Corder, pleasantly. "Somebody's heart's breaking somewhere. Been having after-dinner callers, according to your native custom, eh?"

"It's a very good custom that brings Anthony Le Dane and Lord Ingestow to keep a poor girl from boring herself to death," said Elmira.

Her brother looked at her with frowning inquiry. Elmira laughed and bade him good-night. Sigismund went into the drawing-room.

And though Harriet was able at last to open her mouth, and did there and then tell the poor man a great deal more about his sister than she knew, she did not spoil his rest.

"My dear Harriet," he said, "if men can't look after themselves, they deserve what they get. If a woman can, she deserves the same."

CHAPTER XVI

THE DUCK-FEEDER

IT was on a Wednesday night that Anthony asked Elmira to marry him. On the Thursday morning he awoke at seven o'clock with a heart as light as the skies were heavy. He wondered, indeed, at his own cheerfulness. Had he not, the night before, failed to get what he had asked for? And had he not, as a consequence of that asking, found sleep impossible until four in the morning? Almost abnormally lacking in superstition though he was, Anthony yet found himself, while he shaved, building hope of the future and of Elmira on the shifting sand of a happy mood. Being, in these matters at least, still a child, he missed, for all his acuteness of occasional introspection, the secret cause of his lightness of heart. Many things, Lady Mary's opinion not the least of them, had made him hesitate. The very consciousness that he did hesitate had weighed upon Lady Mary's side of the argument. But the hesitation of Elmira had for the time banished his own. The opposition, mild as it might seem to experience, had quickened desire and strengthened purpose.

The boy was at last certain that he was in love. The mathematical mind of him, assured at last, whether erroneously or not, of both process and working, doubted no longer of a solution to his problem as clear as satisfactory.

Looking, with no interest beyond the technical, into the mirror while he swept his razor over jaws, cheeks and chin, he suddenly remembered how Elmira had rubbed the backs of her slender fingers. He laughed to himself a little; and, in sheer bravado of assured attainment, with six strokes of his blade swept his upper lip clean of the fine, regular black hairs of his moustache.

For three seconds he stared at his altered countenance.

"I wonder," he murmured to his reflected image, "who it is you remind me of."

As the likeness would not be caught, he promptly forgot that he had seen it.

Twenty minutes later he was seated at breakfast, when Axel Forsberg came in.

Anthony turned in his chair to welcome him.

"Good God!" cried the American, when he saw his face. "Of all the damned silly things to go and do—!"

Forsberg had not got over his suspicion that Beldover intended fanning the fire for whose kindling he held himself responsible. And this childish freak of his friend in removing what he thought of in that moment as the last point of distinction between the two men who so strongly and strangely resembled each other, could but add fuel to the flame which he dreaded for Anthony's sake none the less fearfully that the shape of his fear was vague and obscure.

"What d'you mean?" asked Anthony, sharply; nerves, perhaps, having suffered more than appetite, from the shortness of his night.

But Forsberg, knowing that explanation was impossible, had already recovered himself.

"That naked and shameless lip," he replied, laughing, "quite spoils your beauty, my son."

"What rot! You talk like a woman," retorted Anthony. "I thought there was something wrong."

"And I'd lay you my last nickel," said Forsberg, "that it was a woman put you up to the foolishness. Only she didn't tell you it'd make a freak of you." Then across his mind flashed the memory of Elmira on horseback, staring at Randolph Bethune. "And I know who it was, too," he added aloud, unable to check himself in time; but the "and I know what she did it for," he contrived to hold unuttered.

Now Anthony had no wish to speak of Elmira. To Forsberg he had hardly mentioned the girl's name; and only once had Forsberg seen them together; but he had a feeling that these two Americans did not like each other. He feared, moreover, that Forsberg's guess would be as good as usual.

"Aren't we making rather a silly fuss about nothing?" he asked gently. "Since you aren't a girl, it can't matter to you what I look like. Have some food."

Forsberg had breakfasted, but accepted coffee.

"Of course you're quite right, Le Dane," he said. "But one gets used to a certain aspect in one's friends, and I naturally resent the change in yours."

And then they talked of their greater things; of Schom-

berg Delorme, of the "Company," and of the future that these were to make for them.

Now it had been Forsberg's wish, when once he had satisfied himself of the great possibilities of the Delorme Accumulator, to limit their joint enterprise to the exploitation of this invention alone, until Delorme's freedom from anxiety about the butcher and the baker should provide them with more of the same or better kind. But the Englishman in this case advocated the larger game—refused, indeed, to go on unless the scheme, of which he had once given Elmira a sketch, were made the basis of their co-operation. He was not going, he said, to play a peddling game of royalties, after the endless and risky business of forcing Delorme upon the notice and recognition of the trade in the teeth of opposition from every vested interest. They must have, he declared, the cream of the market for themselves; and to that end the Company must be formed and the cars built without the waste of a day, that the world might not wait too long for its cheap electric traction, nor Anthony Le Dane for the wealth which he intended wrenching from the grasp of fate.

Since this is not the story of Anthony's wealth and what he did with it, it is enough to say that this Thursday morning established his supremacy in the alliance. For the American, though he had been accustomed, and in this case until now had expected to lead, yielded, with a grace to be justified in the event as wisdom, to the energy and enthusiasm of the Englishman's argument. At one point of the discussion,

"I'm not forced to do this," said Anthony, "nor anything at all, Axel, except live like a well-groomed pig. But I'm doing it. I'm going to risk the last penny of my own in it. And I'm doing it to get rich."

"What good'll that do you?" asked Forsberg, startled into moralising by what seemed too cynical a statement of his own purpose in life.

"I'll tell you when I have the dollars, Axel," said the other.

And so in the end Forsberg gave in, believing that he had yielded in a moment of weakness. Twice had Anthony called him by his first name; and this deviation from custom came to him like the unconscious prayer of a greater than himself for the help which it is the privilege of the less to provide.

Lesser issues thus decided, and while all Forsberg's tradition was cursing him for the fool he was soon to find he was

not, Anthony said that there was a man in Pimlico whom he must see. It was still early, and Forsberg proposed walking across St James's Park.

Till they reached Marlborough House, Anthony was telling of the speed indicator invented but not yet patented by the man in Pimlico; and after that they fell silent till the little bridge over the pond was reached.

Leaning on its rail was an old man, looking down at the water-fowl. Anthony, absorbed in his thought, and hardly knowing what he did, stopped and leaned over likewise, resting a hand upon the rail some three feet to the left of the old man, who turned his head idly to regard him, and immediately cried out in astonished recognition.

"God bless my soul, Randy!" he almost shouted. And Anthony turned to look down upon a shameful, flaming nose thrust upward at him between shaggy brows and a beard of the type which has been called venerable.

"They told me you were a bit broken up," the old man went on, "but you're just the same, though it's fifteen years since I set eyes on you. Wait a bit, though."

And the long beard shook with excitement as he peered closer at the object of his astonishment.

"No, you aren't the same. It's a miracle. You're ten years younger, when you ought to be fifteen older."

"I'm afraid you are mistaking me," said Anthony kindly, now able to get in his word. "I don't think I ever met you—"

"Nonsense," interrupted the other. "I'm making no mistake. It's natural enough, though, that you shouldn't recognise me, Randy. The whisky has disguised my nose as much as the hair has hidden my chin."

And the old sinner gathered his beard in his fist, pulling it aside in a bunch, meaning thus to show the shape of his face.

"My name," said Anthony, "is not Randy; and fifteen years ago I was a child of eight."

The old man peered for a moment even closer than before; and slowly the animation of excitement faded from his face; crestfallen, he made his excuses.

"I made sure," he said, "that you were Bethune—the great Randolph. But I see I've made an ass of myself. You're much too young."

He looked so much disappointed that Anthony was touched.

"I'm sorry I have disappointed you," he said. "If Mr Bethune is an old friend, why don't you look him up?"

The old man laughed.

"I gave up calling on old friends three years ago—just in the nick of time," he replied. "Hope I haven't annoyed you. Good morning."

Anthony responded kindly, and walked on. Forsberg, who had been a curious spectator of the episode, would have followed his friend; but the grey-beard laid two knotty fingers on his arm. As the big man looked down at him, the old one jerked a thumb after Anthony.

"Friend?" he asked.

Forsberg nodded.

"Ever see Bethune—Thibet Bethune?"

The nod was repeated.

"Then you've seen what I see."

Forsberg's face was entirely without expression.

"D'you know a fellow called Beldover?" continued the old man, assuming an affirmative answer to his last question.

And a third time Forsberg nodded.

"He's been filling me up with drinks and pumping me for Randy's early history. I ought to have known he was after no good, but I didn't think of it till I saw *him*." And he jerked his thumb as before. "Plain English, Beldover thinks there's a woman somewhere could explain the likeness."

"I can't allow you to speak like that," said Forsberg, sternly.

"I sha'n't, after this. I'm just warning you where trouble will come from, if it comes. My mouth's shut now."

And the disreputable old man took from his pocket a dirty paper bag, turned once more to the rail of the bridge, and began dropping bread-crumbs to the ducks.

Forsberg walked quickly after his friend.

Anthony was just passing through Queen Anne's Gate when he was overtaken, and they walked some paces together before he spoke. At last, with a short laugh,

"That was a queer thing," he said.

"Very queer," assented Forsberg, thoroughly uncomfortable.

"D'you think there is any resemblance between Bethune and me?" asked Anthony.

Forsberg wished he had stayed with the red-nosed man, feeding the ducks. He longed for duplicity, since something

must be said. But his fundamental justice and honour prevailed over this superficial cowardice.

"Yes," he said, "I do think so."

"That's queerer," said Anthony. "Does any one else think it?"

"I believe the likeness has been remarked," admitted Forsberg.

"That's queerest of all," said Anthony.

They were now in Victoria Street; Anthony lifted his slender umbrella, and a hansom came to the kerb with a sliding scrape of hoofs.

"I've walked enough," he said, when Forsberg sat beside him. "Come and see the indicator."

If Anthony's thoughts upon this Thursday morning were diverted more than he liked from the business that should have absorbed them, both by the mental image of Elmira Corder, and by this mistaken recognition of himself as Randolph Bethune which, but for that latest glance in his mirror, he would have thought so absurd, Lady Mary Frozier's lot, since in her business of painting pictures she had no partner, was even worse. And in her case the beauty of Elmira was even more to blame than in Anthony's.

At a moment when intrusion meant to her the loss of the better if not the longer half of the morning's work, her brother burst into the studio, unexpected as confident. Before he reached the floor,

"Oh, do go away, Ingestow," she cried, with a flash of her blue eyes that he knew for anger but never thought of as crossness. All Lady Mary's passions, as was once said of her by a man too great to be quoted here, were as clean as her body.

The flash made his heart sink for a moment into his shiny riding boots. But Ingestow was before all things a man of courage.

"I can't go," he said. "At least, I won't, till I've talked to you a bit."

"If you don't," said his sister, "I shall give Eliza warning for letting you in."

"You won't," said Ingestow.

"Why not?" asked Lady Mary.

"It's not her fault."

"Why?"

"Because she's afraid of me. Between the burglar she thought me that first time when I got past her and announced

myself, and the haughty nobleman she begins to believe I am, I scare her into fits. I'm too like the penny novelette she has almost finished reading. If you sack her, I'm bound to marry her."

"Sit down," said Lady Mary. "She wouldn't make you a good wife."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," replied Ingestow, "because it's another woman I want to marry."

Lady Mary's mind leapt to the woman, and his intrusion was forgiven.

"Who?" she asked.

"Miss Corder," he answered.

"Do you mean you are engaged to her?"

"No such luck," said Ingestow.

"Doesn't she like you?" asked his sister.

"I don't know," replied the brother. "I've—I've had a scruple—the most absurd scruple—about asking her."

"Miss Corder wouldn't take offence," said Lady Mary.

Ingestow laughed.

"I'm not afraid of her," he explained. "Perhaps I ought to be—but I'm not."

"What is it, then," she asked; and there was a flush in her cheeks that belied the coldness of her voice.

"It's that boy of yours," answered Ingestow. "The other and only Anthony. He's—he's so innocent."

From mixed causes the flush on Lady Mary's cheek grew deeper.

"Tony," she remarked, "knows his way about."

"My dear sister Mary," said her brother, "one has only to look at you to know you for a purist in language as in everything else."

The ebb of colour from her face was met and swallowed in a tidal wave of painful crimson.

"Therefore," he went on, not looking at her, yet vaguely wondering why she had turned away from him, "—therefore, when I said 'innocent,' I meant innocent. I didn't mean the boy was a fool. I've nearly forgotten everything they tried to teach me, but once I had to choose what I'd cram for something. I chose Juvenal because they told me he was naughtier than the rest, which to my silly mind meant more amusing. It's a queer revenge of morals that only one idea has stuck to me out of all those heavy and indecent hexameters. It came back to me when I met the only Anthony."

"Don't laugh at me, Ingestow," said his sister.

"I don't. It's because I'm getting, in spite of the fear, awfully fond of you, that I'm telling you I think he is the only. I can't remember the words, but—"

"*Ingenui vultus puer*—" suggested Lady Mary, rather shy of her Latin.

"*Ingenui que pudoris*," cried Ingestow. "That's it. With all men, you know, one wants to play the game. But with Anthony—well—you want to play the particular game—cricket as Anthony understands it."

"Well?" asked his sister.

"Well," answered Ingestow, "I want that girl. I think I want her pretty badly. But I don't want her at the expense of nephew Tony's esteem. And I can't make out whether he has or has not a sort of first call—you know—"

"Why don't you ask him?" said Lady Mary; almost forgetting the interests of the old Anthony in her new interest in the elder.

"That'd only force his hand—you must see that, Mary," replied Ingestow. "I'd wait, but he's such a queer boy—might keep me hanging on ten years."

"I advise you," said Lady Mary, trying with little success to keep the elation of hope out of her face, "to go ahead, Ingestow. Act as if there were no Anthony Frozier in the world but you."

"There isn't," said Ingestow.

"How silly of me!" she cried. "But Anthony Le Dane's half Frozier, you know, and naturally it's the half I think of."

"I'm afraid it is—and his is the only side you think of in the case I'm putting to you," said her brother. "I very much doubt, sister mine, whether you are a good umpire."

Lady Mary asked what he meant.

"I mean," he explained, "that you are not playing the game yourself."

"Umpires don't," said Lady Mary.

"Don't shuffle," said Ingestow. "I mean you'd rather see me win—because you don't like the girl."

"Oh, Ingestow!" cried the woman.

"Oh, Mary!" retorted the man. "For Lady Ingestow she'd do well enough, no doubt. But Mrs Le Dane—! And you know the boy wants her. And you'll bless me if I blanket him, eh?"

"I'm not quite so bad," she replied, "as you think me, Anthony."

The name, applied to him by his sister for the first time, struck Ingestow's ear and heart with a tenderness quite new to them.

"For Tony," she continued, "I don't like her. But I can give you the ingenuous boy's own opinion on the rules of the game."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ingestow. "Been putting him on his guard against his poaching uncle?"

"No—not exactly," she answered. "But I did say you seemed much struck with the girl. And even that was said against the grain, because I wanted to be honest with him, little as I wanted him to marry Miss Corder."

He nodded, vaguely wishing that brothers held equal rank with nephews at 7B Cheyne Walk.

"He said that nothing could make him think better of a man than to know that he was his rival."

"The only Tony's a bit of an egoist, after all," murmured Ingestow.

"And that the best woman in the world wouldn't be worth having, if getting her depended on being the first to ask."

"Was the child theorising, or speaking to a point?" asked Ingestow.

"He said he could see no obligation to stand on one side in such cases," continued Lady Mary; "and that a woman must know her mind, if she had any. He meant her heart—but he was shy of the word."

Ingestow rose, and stood looking at her, bending his riding-crop in his hands.

"About either organ the statement would be rash," he said. "So I may go ahead? You see, sister Mary, I'm taking you for honester than most women."

"I am," said Lady Mary.

"Are you honest?"

Her eyes shifted from his.

"That's another matter," she answered.

"If he should be annoyed by the result," said Ingestow, "you'd tell him you told me what he said?"

Her face flushed once more—this time with manifest indignation.

"I shall tell him anyhow," she said.

Ingestow grunted, and turned towards the five steps.

"You know I—I wish you good luck," faltered his sister.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "And I know why."

CHAPTER XVII

THURSDAY NIGHT

BETWEEN lunch and dinner Anthony worked hard. But all that he accomplished was done against the grain. One half of his mind was tempting him with the gracious image of Elmira, while the other half seemed shut off by two heavy curtains, between whose dark folds was ever and again protruded the face of Randolph Bethune, now benign, now sinister, but always insistent.

He dined alone in his flat, meaning to get through more work when he had eaten. But his dinner seemed to have banished Elmira only to leave the other more intrusive than before. At last he pushed away his papers, giving up the pretence of labour.

"Damn Bethune!" he muttered. "What's Bethune to me, or I to Bethune?"

Once out of doors, his steps rather than his intent took him to the club in Sackville Street.

"I'm not doing things myself to-night," he thought, pausing on the steps. "But I may as well go up. Forsberg's here, most likely, and I'll tell him I can't finish those papers till to-morrow."

So he mounted slowly to the large smoking-room on the first floor, pausing at the head of the stair to light a cigarette. Just inside the swing doors he found it burning badly, and stood for a moment, coaxing the fire to perfect circumference.

Now, on his right, at a re-entrant angle of the room, was a group of five men, three sitting and two standing. And their talk was the growth of Beldover's sowing.

Some words of it came to Anthony's ears while his mind was blank.

The talk was in half-tones, but the voice that first struck him was of peculiar quality—a voice, it has been said, that was never heard a second time without immediate memory of the first. The man sat with his back to the doorway.

"You want to prove too much," he said, with enunciation no less perfect than the tones were penetrating. "A likeness so striking is more probably the result of pure accident than of

immediate heredity. Did any of us ever see a son so like his father as that? I think there's been too much of this talk—and I think I know who is keeping it going."

It was here that Anthony found he was listening. As he moved, another man answered the first speaker.

"Besides," said Corell, "if the old Colonel seems an improbable father, there's more against his wife on the score of age. Lady B—"

The first letter of a name was plain upon the youth's lips when he stopped, aghast and open-mouthed, staring at Anthony, who had drawn close to the group. The other men saw the change in the speaker's face; and when they saw the cause, they were silent with a great discomfort; each man trying to remember of what words he himself had been guilty.

"It seems," said Anthony, letting his eyes return, after a glance at the four other faces, to the last speaker, "—it seems I have fortunately saved Mr Corell from a grave indiscretion in the use of a lady's name."

Mr Corell did not like the tone of this remark, but had got no further in reply than the shutting of his mouth and a nervous licking of its edges, when Anthony turned his back, picked out Forsberg at the other end of the room, and went over to him.

"Axel," he said; and Forsberg laid down his newspaper; "there's something that's got to be done, and I don't, at the moment, trust myself to do it. Will you?"

"Yes," said Forsberg.

"It's no business of yours, you know."

"Then it soon will be," replied Forsberg. "Sit down and speak low."

"There's a man over there—Hackney Fyson, the actor. D'you know him?"

"By sight. Seen him act. And you can't forget the voice, if you could the face."

"Not personally?"

"Not yet."

"Then perhaps you'd rather not—" began Anthony.

"It makes no difference," replied his friend.

"Well, then, I want to speak with him—alone—where we can't be interrupted. If he won't come—"

"He will," said Forsberg, rising. "Take a cab to my rooms and wait. I'll bring him inside twenty minutes."

"My place would do," said Anthony.

"It's going to be mine," said Forsberg.

Anthony nodded and walked straight out of the room and the club.

Hackney Fyson, when he saw the tall American sink back into his seat, and the man whose origin had been so wantonly discussed leave the room with white face, straight lips and set eyes, knew that trouble was brewing. It was not only that he had a keen eye for what he called *situation*. He had also a conscience still capable of troubling him.

He knew the big man would rise again. He would not have been in London now, if he had not known, amongst other things, the different ways in which a man will sit down. And he knew that he himself would be better out of that smoking-room. But three years of London and success, after thirteen of the provinces and America, had brought back to him some memory of the time when his name was not Fyson. So he sat grimly in his seat until Axel Forsberg rose, crossed the room and stood in front of him.

"You are Mr Hackney Fyson?" asked Forsberg.

The actor raised his eyes with studied slowness.

"That is my name," he replied. "But I'm afraid I don't know yours."

They eyed each other directly, as Forsberg told him his name.

"Thanks," said Hackney Fyson. "And what can I do for you, Mr Forsberg?"

"I want you to come at once to my rooms with me," said Forsberg.

"For what purpose?" asked the other.

"If I knew positively," replied Forsberg, "I'd tell you."

"I feel disinclined to move," said Hackney Fyson, "unless you can explain."

Forsberg's mouth went grim, and a spark seemed to grow deep down in the steely blue eyes.

"I'll do my best," he said. "A man has just left this room. He's a friend of mine. You, and four men that I guess are yours, have been talking loose gossip with little sense, no decency and a criminal lack of discretion. My friend heard some of it. He is a man and he wants an explanation. He is a gentleman, and so he has sent me to the man he thought the best of the scurrilous five."

Hackney Fyson was divided among three passions—shame, pride, and curiosity. He would have spoken, but,

"Don't take offence," interrupted the giant towering over him. "I'm flattering you. He chose you himself. Are you ready?"

Hackney Fyson rose and followed him out of the room.

When they were in a cab, already half-way to Forsberg's lodging, he spoke again.

"Don't imagine," he said, "that my friend told me anything. What I said just now was gathered from his face and from what I saw across the smoke-room."

The cab stopped in Charles Street. Forsberg told the cabman to wait, opened the door with a latch-key, and led the way to his room on the first floor.

As he mounted those stairs, Hackney Fyson was uneasy in mind. On his election to The Four V.s he had cultivated the acquaintance of Alexander Beldover. He knew little about the man, except one thing of which most others were ignorant; he had accidentally discovered his connection with the press. On his side Beldover had shown great interest in the famous piece from the French in which Fyson was rehearsing the leading part; and he had a pleasant habit of discussing people and things known to Fyson before he had been Fyson. The information being accurate, Fyson made no doubt of the man's good birth; and, with a simplicity of early faith remarkable in a man with the best reasons for infidelity, he had trusted in the birth for good breeding. Of late, however, several matters of varying importance had made him more careful in his intercourse with the author of *Hell's Delight*. And since the conversation at luncheon which had started this gossip, he had kept an eye upon him; with the result that he now attributed the whole Bethune-Le Dane scandal to Beldover's initiative. More than once he had attempted to damp the fire which he was sure Beldover was fanning; and now, finding himself selected as scapegoat of the unlucky five, he cast about in his mind for means to turn the episode to his advantage. For he had chosen this new club as likely to be of more service to him socially than the strictly professional one to which he already belonged. And unless in this crisis he chose his steps with judgment, the membership might prove to have done him more harm than good.

When they entered the room, Anthony stood at one of the windows, looking out into the ill-lighted street. He had thrown off his light overcoat, but his hat was still on his head.

Forsberg switched on two more electric lamps, and at the sound Anthony turned and faced the newcomers.

"Le Dane," said his friend, "this is Mr Hackney Fyson."

Anthony said nothing, but raised his hat slightly. Hackney Fyson in acknowledging the introduction, though even Anthony's gaze did not succeed in making him look awkward, felt for the first time in fifteen years that he did not know what to do with his hands.

Forsberg, when he had put a tray of bottles and glasses on the table, turned to leave the room.

"The cigars are on the mantel-shelf," he said. "You'll find me in the next room if you want me, Le Dane."

"Please stay," said Anthony.

He took off his hat and set it carefully on the table, and asked if Mr Fyson would not sit. Mr Fyson thanked him, and sat, expectant.

"At the club just now," Anthony began, still standing, "I was so unfortunate as to hear some words spoken by yourself and others. It is more unfortunate that I cannot afford to ignore the words, Mr Fyson."

To be called "Mr Fyson" was always disagreeable to the actor. Although he did not use typographical junction of the two names, he yet considered them to be hyphenated in the popular mind. But this time he bore the annoyance with patience.

"It would be wisest to ignore them," he said, quietly. "The talk was foolish and indiscreet. Of course, Mr Le Dane, I cannot tell what words of mine caught your ear. My back was to the door, and I did not see you come in. But I can remember none but an attempt to check the levity of the younger men."

"I heard you allude, Mr Fyson," said Anthony, "to absurd theories based upon the resemblance of two men. Another man mentioned a certain Colonel, and a Lady B—. I saw B upon his lips before I interrupted him. Now, although I have been annoyed lately by remarks and mistakes due to the likeness between a friend and myself; although my father was *Colonel* Le Dane, and my mother was *Lady Blanche* Le Dane, I don't think these things would have justified me in demanding an explanation from you or any of your friends. But the expression of your five faces when you saw mine does give me the right to demand it—because that expression, in

five editions, convinced me that it was I and my people you were talking of."

"You are justified, Mr Le Dane," said Hackney Fyson, "—justified in asking me any question you please. And I will answer any question I feel justified in answering."

"In the conversation of which I heard a few words," said Anthony, "the person whose parentage was debated, then, was myself?"

"It was not questioned by me," answered Fyson.

"By others, then?"

"That," said Hackney Fyson, "I am afraid I cannot deny."

Anthony drew and drank some soda water.

"Will you tell me how this gossip began?" he asked. "People don't amuse themselves with scandalous historical speculations without an exciting cause."

"It began, I think," answered Hackney Fyson, "the day you lunched at the club in company with Mr Randolph Bethune."

"May I ask how you know that?"

"The likeness between you was observed by every man at the table where I sat—and, I believe, by many others in the room."

"Is it so remarkable?" asked Anthony.

"It is so striking—so nearly perfect," replied Fyson, "that I don't think I shall ever scoff again at the dual rôles of melodrama. And," he went on, almost forgetting the extraordinary and uncomfortable conditions of the interview, "as if it weren't strong enough already, you have increased it—to the vulgar eye, doubled it—by removing your moustache." And then, in the interest of the possible *plot*, he forgot himself altogether. "Somebody put you up to that—somebody who had seen you and Mr Bethune together. It's like a woman."

"I think we will stick to the point," said Anthony, coldly.

But he was younger than Hackney Fyson. And Hackney Fyson was skilled in faces. He saw that he had shot straight; and for his own credit, and for the pain that had brought the blood into the boy's white face, he wished that the world had taught him the art of holding his tongue.

"I'm not quite sure," he said, "that I know what the point is."

"First," said Anthony, "I am going to ask you to tell me all that has been said. After that I shall ask you to help me

in discovering the person who has kept it alive for nearly a week on that one chance appearance together which Mr Bethune and I put in at the club. Somebody, Mr Fyson, has been working it, somebody with a motive. Indeed, I heard you hint as much when I was innocently eavesdropping at the club."

This second demand was the one thing Hackney Fyson wished to avoid.

As he hesitated, Anthony released him for the moment.

"But we'll have the whole story—the reconstructed myth, first," he said.

After all, it was more unpleasant, though honourable enough, to tell the evil words than to betray the evil-speaker.

"Oh, what's the good, Mr Le Dane?" asked the poor man.

"It's better to let it lie in the mud."

"I must beg you to tell me all you can remember," said Anthony. And Hackney Fyson could not refuse him. What he had meant to do to cover his own negative error, he did now for pity and respect; telling truly and briefly into what vile shape the sections of Beldover's fret-work puzzle had been pieced together. And when Anthony had heard it all, he found anger striving with dismay for control of his mind. He was too just to vent the anger on a man whose confidence he had almost compelled, and too reticent to display the dismay for strange eyes. It was difficult at first for him to proceed, and there was silence in the room, broken only from without by the night noises of summer London.

At last the victim spoke; but the gentleness of voice and manner was gone.

"Very ingenious—all those dates and places," he said.

"But they don't interest me much. Only malice could find evidence in them—or take the trouble to collect them. And that brings me to the end of my questions, Mr Fyson. Do you know who it is that has taken all this trouble?"

"I'm afraid I do," admitted Hackney Fyson.

"But do not mean to tell me—is that it?" asked Anthony.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid that is it."

"I wish you could," begged Anthony, eagerly and with the first touch of unrestrained feeling that he had shown. "I ought to know—and—well, I want to know."

"I feel guilty enough to make it very hard for me to refuse you, Mr Le Dane," said the other. "But the man is one I have seen a good deal of. I have been so incautious—so un-

fortunate, as to let the acquaintance approach intimacy. And now—not only on account of this affair—I find myself obliged to drop him. I may tell him why, but you yourself wouldn't advise me—much less urge me—to give him away first, now would you?"

Anthony made the inevitable admission.

And then Forsberg spoke.

"I can put my finger on the man when you want him, Le Dane," he said. "But I won't name him while Mr Hackney Fyson is here."

The actor was grateful for the full name, and the man for the relief in his difficulty. He rose to go.

"If there is anything else I can do—" he began.

"Nothing," said Anthony, with a smile somewhat forced. "Unless you know anything else to my discredit of which I have not been informed."

He had not meant to be rude, but the expressive face of Hackney Fyson made him at once ashamed.

"My dear Mr Le Dane," replied the actor, in tones of much feeling, "what I have told you has been at your request. And I should not have told even what I have, but for a feeling of the guilt of even listening to such wanton gossip."

"I beg your pardon, Mr Hackney Fyson," said Anthony. His quick ear had caught the emphasis of Forsberg's use of the double name, and with it he made his amends.

"My pardon? For what?"

"For what I said," Anthony answered.

"I owe you more apology for what I heard," said Hackney Fyson. "Good-night."

But at the door he turned.

"Except to Corell and one or two others," he added, "that is my last word on the subject."

Anthony nodded to him as pleasantly as he could.

"May I take the cab?" said the enforced visitor, as his captor let him out. And Forsberg unobtrusively gave the cabman half a sovereign to set the man down where he would.

Meantime the guest was seated and lighting a cigarette.

"Where to?" asked Forsberg.

"Anywhere. Good Gad, but I'm rattled, Mr Forsberg!" said Hackney Fyson. "The Stage-door Club, please." He leaned forward, throwing away his match. "You know I'm vexed—awfully vexed about this."

"That's all right," said the American, non-committally. "Good-night."

But it is a question whether Hackney Fyson, on the road to his older club, altogether regretted the things which had brought him away from the newer.

Axel Forsberg, however, was not pleased at all. He mounted the stair very slowly, and when at last he had persuaded himself to enter once more his own room, he found his friend lying back in an easy-chair with eyes half closed, smoking. In the attitude there appeared more of indolence than of suffering; and the face, when the eyes opened, was curiously impassive.

"I think you're making too much of this, Le Dane," Forsberg began, rushing into speech. "Of course it's all damned annoying, but—"

Anthony interrupted him.

"How can you tell, old man, how much I'm making of it?" he asked. "The actor has for the moment blunted the edge of my curiosity. I came to the club to tell you that I can't finish those figures of Delorme's to-night—nor the other man's papers. I was too tired before. I'm off now."

He rose, flung his coat over his arm, and put on his hat, with less care than usual of its angle.

"Where to?" asked Forsberg.

"To bed," replied Anthony, turning with his hand on the door-knob. "I slept badly last night, and I can't think of anything but sheets. I needn't tell you—at least, I can't now—how grateful I am to you for bringing that fellow here. I think he was pretty decent, eh?"

"Very decent," said Forsberg.

"Good-night," said Anthony; and then, but for a sudden weakening within him, he would have gone. That weakening, however, not only held the departing feet, but loosened his tongue.

"I suppose," he said—and, do what he would, he could not keep the wistfulness out of his voice, "—I suppose I shall be I to you—whoever I am."

"Of course," answered his friend, more cheerfully than he felt. "It's all flapdoodle, this yarn. Anyway, Anthony, you always have been you, whoever *they* were."

"I wonder," said Anthony; and went home to bed.

Axel Forsberg was too wise to press his company. But he leaned out of his open window, and with his eyes followed

the figure of his friend until it disappeared round the corner of the short street. Then he dropped into the chair Anthony had left, lit a cigar very large and very green, and followed him the rest of the way in his heart. "He slept ill last night—he's worked hard as well as worried hard all day," he mused. "He has done nothing to cause the trouble, he can do nothing to stop it—oh, yes, he'll sleep to-night."

Then his thought, growing swifter and less distinct, hurried over the events of the past few days.

"Their evil-minded imaginings amount to just nothing," he reflected. "It's the red-nosed duck-feeder that gets him in the neck."

He rose, stretched his long arms, and tossed the reeking stump of his cigar into the street.

"All the same," he said, half aloud, "—well, just look at the two faces!"

CHAPTER XVIII

FRIDAY MORNING

HIS friend was not mistaken; Anthony slept well that Thursday night, and further into the Friday than his custom was. On rising, however, he was surprised to find how little rested he felt. As he searched for the cause of what may be called a lack of elasticity rather than positive fatigue, the whole story of the previous day rushed back upon him.

He was at once determined that the matter, at least as far as he himself was concerned, could not be left, as Hackney Fyson had advised, "to lie in the mud." And, in spite of what he had said to the man who had given him information, he found that this morning he cared very little to know who had said these things, or who had prompted the saying of them; but he was sure that, until he knew whether what had been said and what had been hinted were true or false, he would never have a mind at rest. He thought of his Aunt Mary as his only helper; and he was in no wise afraid that she would shirk plain language with him.

"I'd go to her now," he thought, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "if I hadn't almost promised to get through those papers."

When in his workshop he saw those papers in their bulk, a sickening sense of the futility of all things came over him with a rush. If it had not been summer he could have thrown the papers there and then upon the fire. That dark wave which most of us have known so long and so often that each has made for it his own more or less prophylactic name—whether it be *the blues*, *nerves*, *jumps* or a *damned liver*—this wave struck Anthony for the first time, and for a while he was submerged.

But habits of work and instincts of enterprise are not easily banished; and even as he dropped heavily into his desk chair, feeling rather than thinking that he need not and would not do another stroke of work while he lived, his hand stole mechanically to the next paper of his task, and drew it be-

neath his eyes. They fell upon the figures of a complicated calculation, about which, in his interrupted labours, there had gathered some of those associations, nebulous and intangible, which are certainly æsthetic and probably ethical in character. His great ambition appeared to him once more; once more he loved it; loved it the more that he perceived it was the one thing in his life which even the truth of such evil as he had heard whispered could not tarnish nor even touch.

So once more he fell to work.

Bethune had been a frequent visitor of late. This morning Anthony had no wish to see him, and rose suddenly to bid Shinniver deny him even to the "Great Chinaman." He opened the door quickly, pulling its other handle roughly from the fingers of the man he did not wish to see.

Bethune looked at him and smiled.

"You don't want me," he said.

The man's presence seemed to sweep away Anthony's bitterness of mind.

"I ought not to want you or anyone," he said. "But come in for a few minutes. Look at that," he added, pointing to his table, "and you'll understand."

Bethune sat down.

"I'm afraid it's a kind of work I can't help you in," he said.

"Nobody can," Anthony replied. "It's my opinion of other men's conclusions that's wanted, you see. As a rule, too," he added, with what he thought safe reference to his own troubles, "the worse the work or the worry, the less can anyone else help you with it."

Bethune the optimist joined issue at once.

"From my own experience," he said, "I should say it's only when you're really cornered that you find out the use of the other man."

Anthony laughed.

"I've no right to generalize," he admitted. "I've no experience. I can always do my work myself, and worry hasn't been in my line."

Bethune looked at the boy with steady, piercing eyes. Anthony turned to the table, shifting the papers. He had a feeling, which he believed unreasonable, that here, would he but hold out his hand for it, was sympathy and help for him. He felt the intrusion of Bethune's gaze, and wavered.

"Worry," said the elder man, "is an acquired taste. You

can get used to it, like anything else. It's worst when it's new."

Anthony said nothing. It was absurd that he should feel inclined to confide such a trouble as his in any man—in this man, incredible! Yet the inclination was there.

"Something has happened since I saw you last," Bethune went on. "Something that has made you unhappy."

"You're quite right, sir," said the boy. "I wonder how you know. I feel so absurdly childish when I'm talking to you, that I hardly trust myself not to blurt out all my little woes."

"Blurt," said Bethune, with a sudden expression of countenance which swept away, as the sun will kill shadows, twenty-five years of the fifty from his face.

But the very strength of the appeal, which this momentarily transfigured face made to him, put Anthony on his guard. Blurt, he told himself, he would not. But neither would he send the man away until he had tried his hand upon him. Surely he might extract from him some evidence, corroborative or destructive of Beldover's insinuations.

"It's a woman, isn't it?" asked Bethune, with sympathy so direct and sincere that the commonplace phrase sounded in no way offensive.

"To be honest more than I need," replied Anthony, "it was, two days ago. Now it's a man—and the man's the worst."

"Very likely," said Bethune. "Can't you tell me some more?"

"I want to tell you more—and I can't think why I do," Anthony answered. "And I've made up my mind that I won't. I don't mean to be rude, sir, but—"

"You're not," said Bethune. "You've taken a line, and I can only like you better for sticking to it, and warning me off." Then, changing the subject, "My book's out," he said, "and I came to bring you a copy."

Anthony was touched by the simple kindness of the man. As he untied the parcel and turned over the pages to reading which he had looked forward with so much pleasure, he saw his opportunity, and in spite of instinctive distaste for the task, pursued his intent.

"It's a long book," he said. "Didn't you tell me, sir, that you did all the work in three months? It seems impossible."

"Longer than that," replied Bethune. "I had some time at it in India before I started home, and I did a good bit on the voyage. After that came the three months' hard work in Italy."

Anthony asked him why he had chosen Italy.

"Brindisi and old associations, I suppose," Bethune replied. "I used to know out-of-the-way Italy very well. I've sailed thousands of miles in fishing-boats and coasters about its shores, and walked many hundreds over the mule-tracks between its little towns and villages."

Anthony asked him some simple question about Corsica.

"Yes," he answered. "That's quite right. I used to know Corsica pretty well. It was coming from Corsica that I hit upon Santa Caterina and Porto Finaggio for the first time—in rather an odd way."

Anthony closed the big volume and raised it a little from his knee.

"It was at Porto Finaggio you buried yourself to write this, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Bethune. "I went there because I knew what a quiet little place it is—or was, a quarter of a century ago. I didn't find it the same, of course—but it served its purpose."

"I think some of my people used to go there before I was born," said Anthony. "Did you find any English there, twenty-five years ago, Mr Bethune?"

Bethune's face stiffened somewhat at the question; but he answered readily enough.

"Two or three, I fancy," he said. "I saw hardly anything of them."

"I was wondering," continued the younger man, alive to every shade of expression in the elder's bearing and countenance, "whether you ever met or saw my mother at Porto Finaggio. Lady Blanche Le Dane, she was. I've been told she had a villa there—"

"I remember the house," interrupted Bethune. "Lady Blanche was in England, I think, all the time I was at Santa Caterina." And then his face relaxed again, almost to smiling point. "But I did see her once," he added.

"Where was that?" asked Anthony.

"In Bond Street—she was pointed out to me. I remember, because I had already heard her name out there at Porto Finaggio."

"I hardly remember her at all," said Anthony. "Tell me what she was like."

"A tall, strong, very handsome woman, is all I remember," replied Bethune, looking curiously at the boy. "Rather stern—or, at least, dominant, I should say. I can hardly imagine you Lady Blanche's son," he added. "You're unlike her—unlike what I saw that once, I mean."

"Am I so short, weak, ugly and effeminate?" asked Anthony.

"You're long enough and strong enough, and, I imagine, quite fond enough of your own way, and not unaccustomed to getting it," replied Bethune. "But you aren't a bit like your mother."

He was scarcely surprised to note that this assertion did not displease the boy. He was, however, still watching Anthony's face with the intentness of him that seeks for resemblance.

"Do you see any likeness to anyone else?" asked the spy.

If the man had not found what seemed to escape no other eyes, there could be no ground for the scandalous story of last night.

Now in Anthony's Bethune had from almost the first found reminiscence of a face which could not be forgotten. But this likeness was not fixed in feature, outline, or colouring; but belonged to the vivid and elusive subtleties of expression and the spirit. And it was most certainly not that resemblance of which Anthony was then thinking, and which he almost hated himself for his inability to deny.

At his question, Bethune's face seemed to freeze again.

"There are certainly," he said, "points of resemblance between you and your cousin who asked to be introduced to me the other day, out by Muswell Hill."

"Lord Ingestow's my uncle," replied Anthony. "I dare say there's a family likeness."

He spoke as if he had lost all interest in the subject; and soon afterwards Bethune left him.

He did not doubt that what Bethune had said was true. Yet he felt sure that some of the answers had been disingenuous. The man's open unconcern, however, in speaking of Lady Blanche Le Dane, left Anthony more puzzled than before. By indirect means he had tried from Bethune's face to get a clue to the solution of a mystery; and all he had gained was a handful of threads leading, it seemed, to the confusion of an altogether different tangle.

A HUMAN TRINITY

When Forsberg came in, Anthony brushed business aside.

"I can't do any more," he said, "till I've seen this other thing through."

"I'll finish the papers," said his friend. "Show me what you've done."

Anthony showed him.

"Where are you going?" asked Forsberg.

"To Chelsea," said Anthony.

"That's good," said the other. "Now I don't want to push into your affairs, Le Dane, but I can't help knowing you're up against a pretty stiff proposition. When you've got through with it, we can get some work done. Meantime, I'll stay here till dinner-time and finish this stuff. After that I'll dine—let's see—at *The Monaco*. And the rest of the evening will find me at the club."

"Why there?" asked Anthony.

"There might," said Forsberg, "be a chance to break somebody's neck."

"Whose in particular?" asked the other, smiling.

"There's one Beldover," replied Forsberg. "He wears a kind of collar that tempts my fingers."

"Is that the name Fyson wouldn't give me?"

Forsberg nodded.

"I tried to keep him out of the club, eighteen months ago—I did keep him off the committee," said Anthony.

Forsberg laughed.

"I thought there was something. Meantime," he said, "don't forget where I'm to be found."

"I won't," said Anthony.

"You might want me. I'm so mad at the whole thing," said Forsberg with solemn intensity, "that I'm hoping you will want me."

Anthony was silent, slowly pulling on his gloves.

"I'm forgetting," said Forsberg, after looking at his watch. "It's almost lunch-time."

"I don't want any," said Anthony.

"Of course you don't. But how am I to know when you'll think of eating again, with this kind of circus going on? Besides," said Forsberg, "Lady Mary Frozier will be just sitting down to hers when you get there, if you start now. You might let her spoil her appetite with a square meal instead of with your long face and heroics."

He rammed his hat on his head, and forced his friend out of the flat, slamming the door behind them.

As they turned into Shaftesbury Avenue,

"What's the matter with oysters at Scott's?" he asked.

When many oysters and the pint of Chablis had disappeared, Forsberg remarked that there was nothing like them when you didn't want anything. He dragged the meal out with coffee and cigarettes, and at last looked once more at his watch.

"You may go now," he said. "Lady Mary has eaten her luncheon."

As Anthony's hansom disappeared in the traffic,

"I wonder," murmured Forsberg, "—I wonder how much she'll tell him."

CHAPTER XIX

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

PERHAPS his lunch, and certainly his friend's sympathy, so much more expressive in act than word, had raised Anthony's spirits. For, as his hansom bore him over the smooth new wooden road through St James's Park, the horse's feet seemed to beat time to a melody of merriment. And he knew that the soft air, the summer richness of the trees, and the golden sparkle of sun upon water were for him in any event, as well as for the rest of the world always. When Pimlico was past, the green burst upon him once more as they trotted by the Royal Hospital. Here and there in the pathway beside the railings an old warrior's coat burned scarlet. On his right a little crowd clung to the railings, peering through and over where the shrubs were thinnest for sight of the military cricket match in progress within. The smack of the ball meeting the bat came to his ears, and Anthony wished he were inside and in flannels.

"Nothing else matters," he said to himself, "when you're playing cricket."

Then he caught the flash of pretty frocks on the far side of the field, and a blaze of scarlet where the band was sitting. It was all so jolly that he asked himself since when had he grown so mawkish as to let his soul be moved by a whispered scandal, the source and motive of whose fabrication were both so plain to him. And so, although in the few minutes which remained to him between Nell Gwynne's great monument and Lady Mary's house in Cheyne Walk, he went over once more in his mind the points of the case which he was to lay before her, Anthony left the cab with a heart much lighter than he had lifted into it.

He opened the door with his key and went straight to the studio, where he found Lady Mary, not at work, but with her hat on and dressed for walking.

She was standing by the cabinet in a drawer of which she kept the old sketch-book she had once shown him, but had

hardly allowed him to handle. At his step she thrust something into the very drawer, and turned to meet him with a glad smile on her lips.

Her dress was of very graceful simplicity. It might, but for the beauty of the face it showed and the figure it betrayed, have been accounted severe. But Anthony thought he had never seen his pretty aunt so young nor so lovely. He stood at the foot of the little stair, regarding her.

When she had taken two quick steps to meet him and was near enough to see his face clearly, she stopped suddenly; her bright colour disappeared, and she swayed twice as if she were going to fall. In a moment his arms were round her and she recovered her control.

"Oh, Tony!" she exclaimed, with something between a laugh and a sob, "whatever did you do it for? How silly of you!" And she touched his upper lip with her fingers. "You'll think me sillier," she went on, "but really you frightened me. I thought—"

Anthony watched the colour coming back to her cheeks.

"What did you think?" he asked gently.

"I thought you were somebody else," she answered.

"You don't generally faint at sight of a stranger, little aunt," said Anthony.

"I didn't," she replied, "and I wasn't going to."

She disengaged herself from his arms, crossed the room, and closed the drawer in the cabinet. When she had locked it, she returned to him, pulling off her left glove with her bare right hand.

"Never mind," she said. "Moustache or no moustache, you're welcome, Tony, and just in time. Two minutes later you'd have missed me. I was going out." And her hands went to her hat pins. "But I sha'n't go now, unless you'll go with me."

"I'd rather stay here," he answered.

Out came both the long pins, as with head bent forward she busied her eyes with his face.

"You don't look well, dear boy," she said. "You're over-working."

"Work never hurts me," he answered. "But worry does."

"Tell me."

"That's what I came for."

And then Anthony was silent, while Lady Mary, too wise

to interrupt his thoughts, fetched from the box she had given him his tobacco-pouch and the old briar pipe. Very delicately and firmly she filled it, using the slender fourth finger of her left hand in pressing the tobacco to the bottom of the encrusted bowl.

With a smile he thanked her, but would have forgotten to light the pipe, had not Lady Mary struck and held the match for him. And while she did it, standing over him as he sat, and looking down at his face with its unaccustomed gravity of line and wrinkle, her heart shook within her for fear of what was coming. Of what nature the blow would be, she did not even try to guess, but she knew her fortress was in peril.

Her hand, however, was without tremor, and she held the match till the flame was too near her fingers.

Then she seated herself opposite to him, and waited a little longer.

At last,

"Well, Tony?" she said.

"I'm thinking how to tell you," he replied. "Will you answer anything I ask, dear?"

"If I can."

"They're saying things about my mother," he began, awkwardly enough, his eyes for the moment avoiding her face.

Lady Mary went white to the lips, but her voice was unaltered.

"Who?" she asked.

"Everybody—anybody," said Anthony. "It's all over the club—and I dare say," he added, with the egoism of his years, "—I dare say it's all over London."

"What is it they say, Anthony?"

"That my mother played the—played the fool with another man while her husband was on his death-bed, and foisted me—me!" cried the boy, "on the world and on his memory as his child."

"How do you know they are saying such things?" asked Lady Mary; and then, without waiting for his answer to the first, she put him a second question: "What evidence—what facts, or pretence of facts, have they to support such a tale—at this distance of time, too?"

Anthony looked at her keenly.

"I don't wonder you are angry, Aunt Mary," he said. "I know it, because I heard some of it by accident, and forced a lot more out of a man who has apparently been guilty only of

listening. At the bottom of it is another man—a man that hates me; and I must know all you can tell me before I deal with him. He, it seems, has raked up and spread about some ribald talk that went on at the time of my birth—vulgar chaff, I suppose, about an elderly woman and her first baby. They've got the date of my birth; they've done a little subtraction sum, and say that they know that nine months before it—early in May, 1880, that is—Lady Blanche was in Italy, at a place called Porto Finaggio, and had been there for six months at least; that Colonel Le Dane never left England that year—”

“That's not true about Blanche,” said Lady Mary. “She went to England early in May, and didn't get back to Porto Finaggio till the beginning of June.”

Again Anthony looked at Lady Mary. Her words did not comfort him.

“There's plenty more,” he went on. “Their interest in my origin became physiological; Lady Blanche was forty-five when I was born; she had no previous child, though married twenty-three years; Colonel Le Dane was an invalid for seven years before he died. In fact,” continued Anthony, becoming almost brutal in his desire, not so much to get at the truth or falsehood of the scandal, as to drive Lady Mary into plain speech, “—in fact, they went so far—”

“I think you, anyhow, have gone far enough, Tony,” she said, quietly and coldly. “I quite understand. But I'm waiting for the most important part of this disgusting gossip.”

“Yes?” said Anthony.

“You say a man has started it to hurt you. But the man, however bad he may be, wouldn't be so foolish as to begin hinting and saying things like that, unless an opportunity had offered itself—unless some—”

“You mean unless curiosity was already awake? Of course not,” said Anthony.

“Well?” asked the woman.

“His opportunity was the presence at luncheon, in *The Four Universities* Club, and in my company, of the man that they now say was there—”

“Where?”

“At Porto Finaggio—”

“When?”

“Nine months before I was born.”

“And who is this man?”

"He is the man," said Anthony, "whose extraordinary likeness to me has been the cause of the whole thing."

Lady Mary made a movement and an inarticulate sound as if she would have asked more about this man. But as she moved and made to speak, she met Anthony's eyes, fixed upon her with a gaze sternly inquisitive—eyes set in a face strangely altered, to her feminine perception, by the smooth whiteness of the upper lip; and she suddenly checked her words.

"Yes?" said Anthony.

"Nothing. Go on," said Lady Mary.

"You know I can remember neither my—neither Lady Blanche nor Colonel Le Dane," Anthony continued. "You know, or at least you must have guessed that I have never been able to feel even a retrospective possibility of affection for her—neither when I have looked at your picture of her, nor when I have listened to your descriptions. This, in a way, makes it worse for me. I feel all the more bound to do something to ram the lie down their throats. But there's a worse thing than that—worse than not being able to love the thought of her—worse than not knowing how to defend her. I feel as if—I don't know what, exactly—as if there would turn out to be truth—truth of a sort—in the lie."

Then, before she could find him a word of answer, he was on his feet.

"Come here," he said, catching her suddenly but gently by the wrist; and led her unresisting through the open door of her boudoir, and stood before her portrait of Lady Blanche Le Dane.

It was Lady Mary's left hand he had taken; he had drawn it and her arm within his own right. As he looked up at the picture, she pressed a little closer to his side. This movement of tenderness he could not at the moment recognise as an appeal; but his quick senses could not miss the rapid, irregular beating of her heart while the lower curve of her breast rested against his fore-arm. He had no mind to play the detective upon her, and asked her with blunt kindness whether she felt ill again. Lady Mary shook her head, and drew almost insensibly away from his side. And then Anthony knew she was feeling, as plainly as he had felt it, the beating of her blood.

Giving his mind, however, as well as his eyes, once more to all he knew of her sister,

"No," he said at last, very positively, "there isn't a word of truth in it."

"I am sure you are right," she responded warmly. "But what reason do you find in the portrait, Tony?"

"That woman," said Anthony, nodding at the cold, placid face on the wall with a face as cold, "—that woman never loved any man enough to sin for him—not to sin for him that way."

"She never did sin in that way," said Lady Mary. "Blanche was a faithful wife."

Anthony, with a sigh of irritation, turned from the picture which had never pleased him.

"Then show me," he said, speaking with a kind of weary ferocity, "how to prove it—to prove it so that I can hurt these pigs and fools. There's one of them I'd kill gladly, if I could honestly, whether he's lied or not."

"About Blanche," said Lady Mary, "he has lied."

"Well?" demanded Anthony, impatiently.

She drew him back into the studio, and sat where she had sat before.

"Shut the door, dear boy," she said, her voice lingering a little over the last two words.

Anthony shut the door.

"You want proof?" she asked.

Anthony nodded.

"I can prove it to you," said Lady Mary; and two bright spots of colour glowed high on her cheeks, while she seemed to devour him with her eyes. "But it's proof you won't want to use, Tony darling—proof that you'll—you'll—"

There she broke off—but spoke again before he could find a word.

"No, Tony—don't," she cried. "Leave it alone. Let it die of itself."

"It wouldn't be fair," he persisted, with a gesture toward the door of the boudoir. "It's not right to her."

"Very well. Kiss me," said Lady Mary, "and I'll tell you."

Anthony stooped and kissed her cheek, wondering. She caught his head between her hands, pressing her lips to his mouth with a passionate tenderness that made him wonder more.

"You *will* have it?" she asked between her kisses.

"I must have it," said Anthony.

Once more she kissed him; and then,

"Blanche," she said, "never loved anyone but me and you, Tony. She didn't even love Charlie Le Dane, though she was

always correctly good to him. And Blanche," she added, with that effort which produces the final and necessary word, "—Blanche never had a child."

Anthony stared at her, for the moment speechless.

"Look here, Aunt Mary," he said at last, speaking almost roughly, "I wish you'd tell me which of us is going mad. Did she pick me out of the gutter?"

Lady Mary shook her head.

"I come to you," cried Anthony, passionately, "almost afraid to hint that I'd like to know more about my father. That was bad enough, anyhow. And all the answer you give is to turn me round and set me hunting for a mother. Do explain yourself."

"I'm afraid."

"Then you shouldn't have begun. It's too late to stop."

"You are not her son," she repeated, vainly procrastinating; and her face was stupid with fear.

"Am I his?"

"Whose?" she asked, her lips barely forming the words, and her voice less than a whisper.

"Colonel Le Dane's?" said Anthony.

"No," she answered.

"Oh, let's begin at the beginning," he cried, with something like a sneer, which failed altogether to hide his suffering. "Who was my mother? Tell me that, if you know."

"I do know," she answered, forcing herself to look up into the face that was grown so terrible to her. "Don't you?"

When he met her eyes, Anthony did know.

"Oh, my God!" he cried; and to the mother the time seemed to throb unmeasured and illimitable until he spoke again.

"Am I—" he said at last, "am I illegitimate?"

And that blemish passed from the mother's face to the son's heart without need of words.

But Anthony made no comment, thrusting the pain downward that he might go to the end of his inquisition.

"And the man?" he asked, speaking more gently from courtesy rather than from any pity or love he could feel in that moment.

"I don't—oh, Tony! I don't know his name," she cried in agony.

"You—you loved him?"

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered, eager to speak her great excuse. "I loved him—indeed I loved him."

"And you don't know his name," he said, almost incredulous. And then it flashed into his mind that she had told him once before of a man that had been her friend, whose name she did not know.

"I have never known it—he went away. I have never seen him since—only once—and— Oh, Tony!" she implored, "now you have made me tell you so much, let me tell you all about it."

"Oh, yes," he replied, "you shall tell me all about it. There'll be plenty of time."

And he went to the door of the boudoir.

"Where are you going?" she asked, her voice shrill with terror.

"Into the garden," said Anthony, "to find out who I am."

CHAPTER XX

LADY MARY'S SCISSORS

AND so Anthony, shutting the door of the boudoir behind him, crossed the little room to its open French window, and stepped out upon the grass.

From the days of his earliest memory of that house, down to a time more recent than he would yesterday perhaps have been willing to admit, he had never made that short passage from the unchanging northern light of the studio to the greenness and variety of the small garden, without a certain effort of moral courage. In the earlier period he would resolve before opening the inner that he would not on his way to the outer door look upward as he passed at the picture hanging above his right shoulder. But the nearer his resolve came to achievement, the more strongly did those pale eyes, which he knew must follow him till the garden was reached, seem to draw and tempt him to the turning of his head. Not often did he reach the turf and the two trees of his desire without the one fearful, final glance from the stone step, to see "if they were still looking."

A later stage of this childish obsession dated from the day when he had resolved to look the portrait of the woman his little soul had never believed to be his mother fairly and squarely in the face each time he should pass it. Straightway the attraction became repulsion, and he struggled to look where he would not, even as before he had striven to resist the fascination of fear.

With years and distance, school, college and work, all this had become a memory, as of a less pleasant fairy-tale in an old book that was dear. But the memory was always there; and it was not many days since, in tender, egoistic mockery of the child he thought of as dead, passing the portrait once again, he had murmured to himself his old psychological riddle: "To look or not to look—that is the question."

And now, as he almost brushed its frame with his shoulder, the picture and the pictured woman of the pale eyes were

nothing to him. So wholly nothing, that, as he passed, he did not even remember that they had ever been anything.

But, as his second foot left the single stone step for the grass, there emerged through the stupor of his disgust an automatic inclination to look behind him. For the fraction of a second, so clearly marked that no hour nor year could better have told its tale, he wondered why he should wish to turn. Then he knew why, and even in his misery he laughed.

"It's a drop of freedom," he thought; for the child was still alive, and the child began to find the man's compensation.

Anthony was still morally dazed, if not mentally confused. He stood in the middle of the little lawn, and looked down at the green. He wanted to begin thinking, and there was no beginning, no middle, no end of anything. He turned his eyes upward, and in the tender blue of the sky he seemed to read the vile word which marked the extent of his claim upon his fellows.

It wasn't much to get, he thought, for looking in that direction. Yet, in a rough, confused kind of way, he did get thinking.

He thought of how he had held himself in the world. For, in whatever surroundings, Anthony Le Dane had been somebody. And Anthony Le Dane had never been the last to know it. Pride of birth claimed virtue without merit, and effrontery alone had accused the boy of *side*. This serene satisfaction, indeed, in the stock of which he believed himself sprung, had acted rather in the direction of personal modesty than in that of self-esteem. For Anthony did not know, and would hardly have believed had one told him, how highly and how widely he was valued for qualities peculiarly his own.

How, then, he asked, would he feel within himself, when he next entered a company of men? For not yet had he begun to consider the bearing of other men toward himself. That was lying in ambush for him, behind a greater question. And that too—the greater question of what the world was to know and not to know—would have to be answered. But for the moment it was: What shall I do? How shall I bear myself? with no thought, for this day at least, of whether his fellows would make it easy for him, or hard.

Then he thought of his work; and, as he had told himself coming through the park, he knew the work and its motive were still his. And he remembered how Axel Forsberg had said, "You have always been you, whatever they

were." These things he acknowledged, and believed them to sum up his future. But he found them, nevertheless, altogether ineffective, either as tonic or anodyne for his present suffering.

He walked aimless across the narrow lawn to the tiny summer-house of so-called rustic wood-work. He sat on its hideous and knobby seat, and thought he was still thinking. At the end of five minutes, however, all that came to the surface was himself, with one elbow leaning on a table knobby as the seat, while the other hand played idly with a pair of scissors, digging with their points little holes in the rotten bark of the foolish half-cylinders of undressed wood whose ordered ranks made the ancient charm of the table-top.

When he saw the scissors, he rose to run, as with legs short, fat, and half-naked, back to the studio.

"Aunt Mary's lost her scissors again," was the thought which rose almost to his lips, before he remembered, and sat down.

What had been the beauty of the little, old, twin cutting tool, when he had with his own pocket-money bought it, with his own grubby fingers tied it into a shapeless parcel, and with his own loving little heart presented it to her on some bygone birthday, was perhaps no more beautiful than the worm-eaten, earwig-haunted summer-house was rustic. But, as he would never hear of the pulling-down of that silly shelter, so could he never see the two halves of that stork, whose feet were loops and its beak sharp points, without a glow of the old joy in a work of art which had tempted him thirteen years ago, while those shillings were burning holes in the left pocket of his trousers.

His hands had been clumsy with the cold that morning; and as he unwrapped his prize for the fifth time on the way home, for one more look at it, he had pricked his left thumb with the stork's beak. The thumb had bled, and Aunt Mary had discovered the blood and its source, and poor Tony had only just escaped disgrace because he refused to tell how he had come by his wound.

She had said how pretty they were. And those scissors she had prized very high, if not first, among her treasures. But, as one woman her spectacles, another her purse, or a third her keys, so Lady Mary would lose her scissors. Scissors big and little, old and new, sharp or blunt she seemed to repel, like an inverted magnet. But with this pair, she had declared,

it should be otherwise. She would never lose them, she had said—and had lost them times past counting for the boy's keen eyes and sharp, animal wits to find again as often. Found, he would bring them to her, and puzzle his head for every time some new form to his loving gibe at the scissors-loser. All this had been long ago, and the scissors were still here—here with the ear-wigs.

And the woman was in there—in there with her thoughts—worse thoughts for her, perhaps, than his for him.

He looked again at the dull-shining, flattened bird with its sharp beak; and, half forgetting the lapse of time, looked from the scissors to the thumb of his left hand. Just there in the ball of it was the place where the beak had stabbed him. She had put nice stuff on it when the hurt grew angry; and had said with gentle reproach: "You might tell me how you did it, Tony. I always tell you everything, little boy!"

And even after that he had held his tongue for a day and a half!

But when the great day came, and the beauty of the gift was revealed, she had said he was a plucky boy to stick to his secret. If she had not told him everything, she too had known and practised the courage of silence, until he and events had tried her too hard.

"Her love for me drew, and Lady Blanche's honour drove her," Anthony mused. "Her thoughts aren't worse for her, after all. They're all about the wrong she has done me—and mine are the same. And that makes all the difference."

Then his thought wandered in the paths of casuistry.

"Conceived in any other moment, under any other conditions," ran the fruitless exercise, "I should not be I. And even Axel admits I am that. Then how can she have wronged me, when I did not exist? I might claim a right to non-existence, but if I refuse suicide as a first experiment in that direction, it means I have no claim at all—no case against her—unless for all those years of deception. But it is not really the twenty-three years' ignorance that hurts," his honest thought admitted. "It's the five minutes' knowledge. And I forced it out of her. Perhaps to her I am the wrong—the personification—the materialised and spiritualised eternity of what she will never cease thinking of as sin. Am I her sin, I wonder?" he asked himself; and found denial in the clear mental picture of the pure face which had smiled upon him for

all his years of memory. The smile, as he now perceived, had not seldom rubbed elbows with sorrow, but never, he thought, with remorse. And then he slipped happily out of casuistry, and thought more clearly of the love that had been his; love precedent, love continuous; love so self-oblivious that it was able to do more than cover the sins of its own beginning. For in her he had proof of Love's alchemy, and believed the sin transmuted long ago into sacrament.

He picked up the scissors, and went back to the house.

The mixture of thought and feeling which we call reverie is hard to put upon paper when the thinker and feeler is a man. The limping translation doubles in difficulty when the book is the brain and heart of a woman. Grammar, dialect and vocabulary are but vaguely apprehended, and ellipsis is frequent to confuse.

The conclusion, however, is in most cases clear enough. But Lady Mary Frozier had reached no conclusion at all, when Anthony opened once more the door between her boudoir and the studio where she sat.

With face white and tearless, with hands apart and lying listless upon her knees rather than in her lap; with eyes directed upon the door, yet seeing nothing but what was behind them, she sat, a woman too hopeless for the present sting of shame to quicken her agony.

The lost eyes did indeed rise mechanically to Anthony's face as he entered, but they showed no expectation even of evil.

He closed the door softly.

"I've found your scissors," he said.

The tone rather than the words brought the soul upward from the depths. Hardly could it be said at his first words to reach that beautiful face of despair. But there was a dawn. The eyes cleared with understanding, and the lips moved.

And when Anthony saw the dawn, he flung bastardy, the world and pride to the devil. Never before had he seen that face of stone; and until he saw it he had not known how much he loved her.

Standing close before her, upright as a small boy pleased with his deed will stand to report, he spoke, repeating his words,

"I've found your scissors again. It was in the summer-house this time, mother."

For a moment before the storm of her tears was upon her,

the great violet-blue eyes shone with her passion. Then her arms went out, and Anthony came to his knees that they might go round his neck.

Thus they held each other, for the first time mutually conscious mother and son. And while the sobs of her weeping beat physically against his heart, the son learned in that contact with the convulsed bosom of the woman that had borne him something of the price she had paid through the dreary years in which the ludicrous name of aunt was all the verbal honey she might gather from the only lips which had drawn milk from her breast.

Her hands were at last unlocked, and slid each to a shoulder, that her face might draw backward to look on the son who knew her at last.

And then one hand must leave the support of its shoulder, to brush away, with rudimentary instinct forgetting even the handkerchief, the blindness of tears from her eyes. Seeing her action,

"Don't cry, dear," said Anthony.

With tears her face streamed already, and his simple words drew more to chase them. When his handkerchief and his tenderness had brought sunshine at last over the face of the waters, she pressed his head between her hands, and spoke

"My son—oh, my little son!" she said.

And then love gave to Anthony the only word of comfort; and Anthony gave it to the woman.

"I'd rather be yours that way," he said, "than any other woman's in the other."

Two minutes later she found words again, and pushed him a little from her, for room to speak.

"I was afraid, Tony," she said, "Oh, so much afraid! And yet it wasn't fear that kept me so long from telling you; for there were times almost every day when I could hardly keep from it—only to hear you call me what you called me just now—even at the risk of your cursing me in the same breath."

Anthony closed the distance between them, and, with her head upon his shoulder, asked what was it, then, had kept her silent.

"To tell you that," she answered, her face paling again, "I shall have to tell you everything."

"Yes," he said, with gentle finality. "But not just yet. Dry your pretty eyes once more, dear, and ring the bell for tea."

Lady Mary almost gasped.

"I know bathos is a very shocking thing," he continued. "But so is hunger. So is a fainting-fit. You're going to drink tea and eat bread and butter and things first."

Lady Mary would have objected, but Anthony had his way.

"It's Eliza's afternoon out," he said. "I saw her turn up Flood Street with her young man. Old Sarah won't know you've been crying, dear, if you're plucky." Then, feeling the absurdity of his assertion, he added: "And if you aren't, she'll only say it's Master Tony's been worritin' you again. I bit her once, you remember."

Lady Mary laughed in spite of herself.

"I know you did," she answered.

"And Sarah and I both knew she deserved it. Ring for her. We've got to keep stiff upper lips, you and I, dear."

And Lady Mary, as she obeyed her son, shivered as if his last words had thrown a chill of shadow out of the future over her ten minutes' happiness. For, shame or no shame, these had been the best ten minutes of her life.

Before Sarah appeared,

"I'm going to write a letter—in here," said Anthony, opening the boudoir door. "I sha'n't be three minutes."

But the minutes were ten at least before he returned with his letter, stamped and sealed in his hand. For the letter, Sarah, and the tea were but ingredients in the dose of commonplace with which he would steady his mother's nerves, before she should enter upon the full telling of that tale, whose latest page was his present suffering.

As he had shut the door upon her he knew of no letter urgent to be written. He sat at her writing-table, and all its daintiness smote him. With this thing to bear, and bear alone, how pleasant and good—how wise, merry and tender she had been with the boy, to whom in presenting her motherhood as vicarious she must have hourly wounded her heart!

His own trouble, to go with him through his life, was drumming in a subconscious ear all the time. But at present he would think of her only. A letter, then, must be written, to keep up his appearance of power to attend to other things.

Open on the table lay a little book of addresses; and it was open at the name of Mrs Sigismund Corder.

Elmira!

Of Elmira he had not thought, it seemed, since he had met the old man who fed the waterfowl in St James's Park. He

would write to Elmira now. Someday she must be told. Surely, then, he ought to tell her before the last of those days in which she was to find him an answer. To himself, now or to-morrow could make no difference. He would have it off his mind.

So to Elmira he wrote. But even when he again entered the studio, he had not made up his mind to post the letter. It is true that he wished to get it over. But ought he to take a step so decisive before he had heard his mother's story to the end?

These were his thoughts until he saw Sarah's face. She stood at the top of the five steps, turned for a final glance of devoted austerity at the tea-table. With the tea-table she was content, but not with the next thing upon which she cast her stern eye. As that next thing was his own face, Anthony knew her discontent, and knew that his was not the first countenance the old servant had read since he left the studio.

"Please get this posted at once, Sarah," he said hastily, bent on protecting his mother. For Sarah would read the address; and, having seen the beautiful American girl, would believe that he had quarrelled with Lady Mary about Elmira. So the letter went on its way; and with it immediately Sarah upon hers.

Anthony came to the table.

"I didn't mean to post that yet," he said.

Many women would have asked "why not?"

"Why did you, then?" asked Lady Mary.

"Because I saw her face," he answered, almost gaily, "The letter will put her on a false scent."

"Oh, yes, I see," said his mother. She spoke with a dull gravity which made it plain she put no faith and took no interest in small subterfuge.

"And I'll tell you who it was to and what was in it," he went on, "when we've settled other things. And we'll settle those other things when you've had some tea."

He poured it for her, made her drink, made her eat, and, before he had done, even made her laugh.

"Thank you, dear boy," she said at last. "I do really feel better. What trouble you do take with me! Sit down and I'll tell you everything I know."

But Anthony did not sit.

"There's something to do first," he said. And he touched

the long, thin chain that fell from her neck and disappeared in her waist-band.

"I want you," he said, "to give me the little key that hangs near your watch."

Lady Mary looked at him, drew out the watch, detached the small key and put it into his hand without a word.

Anthony gave her not even thanks. He went slowly to the cabinet, and with the key opened the drawer which he had seen her lock that afternoon, as so often he had seen her lock it before. From the drawer he took the old sketch-book in which was the portrait of himself—the child seated on the high stool. He closed the drawer softly and slowly, and went with the book to the other side of the room till he stood beneath the high, arched north window. And there he began to turn the leaves, slowly and with reverent touch of the fingers. Half-way through the book he found what he wanted, looked at it steadily for the better part of a minute, and then turned to a small mirror hanging in a corner of the room. He seemed there to make comparison of his own features with the features he had found in the book.

Then he came to his mother and gave the thing into her hand.

Lady Mary took the book, letting her hand fall with it into her lap. There was no colour in her face, but she felt the whole skin of her body on fire. She let her gaze follow her hand, not to look now on what she knew always, but because she could not lift her eyes to Anthony's face.

"That might have been drawn from me to-day," he said quietly. "But it is dated Porto Finaggio, May, 1880. Is it my father?"

Lady Mary bent her head lower; and in her inarticulate murmur of assent there was no ambiguity.

"It is no wonder, then," he went on, "that all this has happened. The gossips were right in one half of their tale. That is the portrait of Randolph Bethune."

There was heavy silence for a while, and then Anthony sat beside his mother, taking her once more in his arms.

He kissed her cheek.

"Now," he said, "you shall tell me."

BOOK II
THE TWO

CHAPTER I

PORTO FINAGGIO

THE story which Anthony heard that afternoon was only one side of the drama which had set him there to listen. It shall be told, however, as the rest has been written, with the fuller knowledge that came to him later.

The late Lord Ingestow had been famous for his Whig politics and his Tory habits. He had many projects and some purposes in life, but in the chief of these alone did he succeed—and that only in the last decade of his seventy-one years. He thought much of his county, more of his party and his prejudices, but most highly of all things did he esteem his own family.

For this, at the early age of three and twenty, when matrimony had no intrinsic attraction, did he marry.

A friend asked him why he would do this thing.

"I'd have had to give up following the hounds, and a good many other things," replied this pious young man, "if I hadn't found a healthy young woman to take me. Every man that cares for the people behind him wants to keep the thing going, and ought to have one boy at least screaming in the nursery, for the sake of his nerve. Yes, I think she'll do."

Unfortunately, she did not do—did not, that is, do what he wanted. For, though she gave him a daughter in the year 1836, this wife bore him no other children, and died in the early forties.

In spite of his principle, he made no second experiment until he was in his fiftieth year. He had, perhaps, relied upon his daughter Blanche, whom he married in 1858 to Major Le Dane. But when Blanche had been three years without offspring, Lord Ingestow declared at last that he would marry, and go on marrying till duty was accomplished.

His second wife was mother to the Lady Mary Frozier of our story, and died in 1864, when her baby was a year old.

Eleven years later, in his own sixty-fourth, Lord Ingestow married for the third time; and in 1878 his one success came

to him in Anthony Frozier, his successor. The remaining five years of his life were spent in consistent endeavour to make the child unfit for the position he was begotten to fill. With more time, he might have added another success to his record.

Lady Blanche, then, had been a married woman some six years when her half-sister was left motherless. With no opposition from the father, who displayed only perfunctory interest in his daughters, she took the baby into her charge and into her heart. The little girl, as has been suggested, was, indeed, its only occupant, and ran some risks from the lonely tenancy.

Until her father's third marriage, Lady Blanche Le Dane, from a sense of duty, would pay frequent visits to him, spending many continuous weeks with the old man, who grew into some affection for his younger daughter. But their first visit upon the new bride's invitation was the last; and by the time Mary Frozier was seventeen she could not remember her step-mother's features.

Two years before she reached that age, the girl showed signs of failing health. Blanche dieted her, Blanche worried her, Blanche made her run the gamut of Harley and Brook Streets. She took her to the old house in Cornwall where she kept her husband while Parliament was not sitting. There the child gained weight and colour rapidly for a time. But when the summer was over, she lost them both, week by week, as the year slipped on to its end.

The poor Blanche, who loved only one thing on earth, went nearly crazy. She wished she could scold poor Mary, but dared not. She scolded Colonel Le Dane instead. To scolding that good man was little used, and he took the dose in a manner very embarrassing for his wife.

"I wish we'd had one of our own," he said, ignoring altogether her fictitious accusations.

Lady Blanche, with wavering indignation, asked him what he meant.

"You're worried about that child," he replied. "I quite understand. She does look seedy. If she'd been mine—and yours, you'd have cared a bit more, wouldn't you?"

Lady Blanche was never cross with him again. She was more woman than even her sister knew, and was well aware that she had missed at least as much as her husband.

But it was now December, and all the child she had grew rapidly worse. And in her need she had the luck to meet

with a country doctor of quite uncommon common sense, with ideas which, if not all his own, were at least ahead of his times.

Lady Blanche was weary, perhaps unreasonably, of Cavendish Square and its neighbourhood. Of Dr Trethewy she heard, and to Dr Trethewy she went with her trouble. Dr Trethewy came to see it, and screwed up his ugly mouth in meditation while Lady Mary Frozier fastened the clothes over the pretty shoulders that were too thin. She did not blush now as she had blushed in those earlier investigations. She had come to think it part of her normal and tiresome duty to bare her chest to inquisitive ears and impressive stethoscopes. This man, moreover, for reasons of her own, she liked better than his predecessors.

Dr Trethewy's mouth slowly unscrewed itself. Lady Mary waited languidly till it was plain he had done with her, and then withdrew.

Lady Blanche gave him at once the length and breadth of her views. His own, being of value, would not spoil, he thought, with keeping.

"Riviera? Well—yes—I don't know," he said, when his opportunity came. "There's lots of choice, Lady Blanche—sea voyage—Swiss mountains, the Nile, Madeira, the Cape—"

But Lady Blanche had a friend who had spent two winters in a villa at Diano Marina. Having had excellent health when she went there, this woman was never tired of singing the praises of the beautiful shore which had effected her marvellous cure. Lady Blanche had her mind made up, and Dr Trethewy, in yielding, gave her good advice.

"Very well," he said. "Italy, if you like—and I'll choose the place for you."

"Why?" asked Lady Blanche.

"Because I won't have the girl taken to one of those plague-spots," he replied, bluntly. "She's not consumptive yet, but she's over-grown, bloodless and bored—just ripe to contract the beastly thing the moment you give her a chance."

In the end he found for them a clean little villa at Porto Finaggio.

"No English there," he said. "Now, mind: no medicine, no shut windows; keep her out of the dumps and out of doors all day. Let her eat what she likes and do what she likes, and she'll be a stone heavier before the end of May."

Lady Blanche hated loneliness, believed in drugs, and feared every open window. A drop of rain she had been

taught to dread as much as any cat. But her greater fear overcame all the less, even as her prejudice in favour of the Cornish doctor swallowed all her other prejudices. She obeyed, and soon found that obedience was her wisdom. Towards the end of the season Trethewy, long without a holiday, and much interested in his patient, made them a visit at Porto Finaggio. And there, instead of the anæmic fifteen-year-old he had sent out, he found a strong, healthy and very beautiful young woman, whom, but for her skirts and her plaited pigtail, he would have taken for nineteen.

This he told to Lady Blanche.

"What shall I do next?" she asked, beaming upon him. "You've been so successful, doctor, that I'm going to do everything you tell me."

"Take her home in May," he said. "Put up her hair, and give her pretty frocks. Let her be 'grown up,' and see that she has lots of fun to make up for the dull winter."

"Good gracious! Why, she's barely sixteen," cried Lady Blanche. "Besides, she hasn't been dull—not for an hour."

"What does she do?" asked the doctor.

"Climbs the hills, rows, swims—and paints. Her sketches have merit, I think, and she's never tired of painting. She wants more lessons when we get home."

And then Trethewy laid down the law. It was because he wished the girl to have one more winter at least at Porto Finaggio, that he insisted upon her enjoying, in the five months at home, as new, varied and happy a life as could be given her. "Painting if you like, but no Slade or South Kensington. Let her paint cows and haystacks. And, if you won't bring her out yet, there's the theatre and the opera. Oh, you know better than I do, Lady Blanche, how to fill her mind with a host of new things to bring back here with her next season. She'll expand under the system, and see this place like a new place, and her second stay here won't pall as it would if she'd only the first season's memories to fall back upon. Maybe she's even now expecting the dull old round of schoolroom and garden. She's had too much schoolroom. That's why I wouldn't let you bring the German woman."

"She'll never be 'finished,'" said Lady Blanche, protesting so feebly that the doctor became more candid than before.

"You'd have finished her for good and all," he said, "if you hadn't come to me."

If Blanche enjoyed being bullied by the man, Mary en-

joyed his company for its own sake. Five months ago she had told Blanche that she liked him better than the other ones. He was like a nice sort of farmer feeling a horse over, she had said. The others had all white fingers, and touched you as if you were too dreadfully precious, and might break.

And now he was a guest, and one could forget altogether that he was a doctor—unless some end could be served by remembering.

"I want you to do something for me," she said to him two days after his arrival.

"Of course I will," said Trethewy.

"Come for a walk, and I'll show you what it is," said the girl.

She tucked her arm through his, and started off down the rough, stone-paved mule-track towards the little town which lines the edges of the harbour. She walked at a pace which put the doctor's shorter legs on their mettle. When she had him almost out of breath, she slackened speed.

"You're a dear old thing," she exclaimed, gently pressing his arm, "and I've decided you sha'n't walk all the way."

When people made little mysteries, Trethewy asked questions only if he was not interested; so they reached in silence the smooth, narrow road which overhung the sea, winding in and out with the little bays and headlands all the way to Santa Caterina; a carriage-road upon which in those days no carriage had ever run, its ends being alleys narrow even for Italy.

The mule-track had brought them down the eastern shoulder of the mountain spur which formed the eastern side of Porto Finaggio's almost land-locked harbour. As she stepped upon the macadam, uncut by wheels, and packed to a wonderful smoothness of surface by the boots of men, the naked feet of women and the saucer-like shoes of the infrequent mule, the girl turned to the right, and they followed the road as it bent round the cut backbone of the ridge. They were now directly above the harbour, which yet they could not see. For on their left was a long row of buildings, with continuous roof and many open doors. It might have been a line of peculiarly ugly cottages, dumped by some freak of magic out of a Lancashire manufacturing town upon this magic hill-side of grey olive and golden sun.

Lady Mary darted into the first of the dull little doorways, and ran laughing down flight after flight of ill-lighted stone

stairs. Trethewy followed more slowly, feeling his steps. The place smelt of cheese and garlic and roasting coffee. And then, just as he began to wonder when they would end, he came to the last step, and walked out at the foot of the pile of tenement-houses by whose roof he had entered, into such a blaze of sunlight as fairly took away his sight. He moved forward blindly, thinking to overtake his guide, and, but for her sudden hand upon his arm, would have walked from the narrow quay into the blue water of the harbour.

When his eyes grew used to the light, he was astonished by the beauty which met them. Behind him, indeed, buttressing the hill-side, was the tall, ugly line of houses, without ornament other than the paint which seemed to have been laid on, fortunately long ago, by amateur scene-painters; but in front was the blue water, as clear almost as that of the little bay where the boat from Santa Caterina had put him ashore on his arrival; on its surface lay fishing-boats and rowing-boats in plenty; a small, white-painted yacht at its moorings, and a little rusty tramp steamer with a grey funnel. More fishing-boats were drawn up on the narrow strip of white sand, away to the right at the end of the harbour, under buildings less modern than those of the quay; there were arches here and there, and a flavour of the Moorish clung to them out of their history. On the other side of the harbour, the olives came almost to the water's edge, while the houses straggled up the ridge above them till they ended in the church.

This church, with its high white tower, stood at the narrowest point of the little promontory which defended the harbour so securely from the open Mediterranean; and its walls on the further side were in upward continuation of the sheer cliff of stone which supported them. Often in February and March, in a rough sou'-wester, had Mary seen the spray from the waves which broke at its foot, flung clear over the bell-tower to fall, harmlessly splashing, on the smooth water of the harbour. For beyond the church this high neck of rock spread and rose to its junction with the olive-covered, round-topped hill which stood out bluntly so far into the sea, that it gave security not only to Porto Finaggio itself, but even shielded in a measure the little bay beyond, above whose waters stood the Villa Parecchia.

All this, with the vivid colour and the clearness of atmosphere which made everything seem too near to him, the newcomer stood to admire.

"I'm so glad," cried the girl, "that it was calm when you arrived; or they'd have landed you here."

"Why not?" asked the little doctor.

"Because I've been longing for months," replied Mary, "to bring somebody down from the garret to find this for the first time in the cellar. Isn't it jolly?"

Trethewy said it was very jolly indeed, and the girl called aloud, in the musical *patois* of the place, for her own especial boatman.

He left his mending of nets at the first note of her call; and while Mary chattered on, Trethewy noticed that the pride of the fisherman's alacrity was reflected in the decently restrained jealousy of half-a-dozen others, who would willingly have stood in Camolino's shoes had he worn any.

"He'll take us most of the way—that's to save your legs, Dr Trethewy," she said, while Camolino bailed a thimbleful of water from his boat, and swabbed the seats dry of the last drop he had let fall on them. "But I warn you that you'll have to walk home."

"Home from where?" asked Trethewy.

"Home from IT," said Lady Mary.

"Oh!" said Trethewy. "And why must I walk?"

"Because the walk home is part of IT," she replied.

"What is IT?" he asked, breaking through his custom.

"I knew I could make you ask me," she cried. "It is what you've got to get for me."

"Get!" echoed Trethewy. "I thought I was to do something."

Camolino was standing with his back to the boat's stern, pushing instead of pulling at his oars. The boat glided towards them along the quay.

"You can't get anything without doing something," replied the girl, sententiously.

And then they entered the boat, Lady Mary taking the yoke-lines while Camolino did the work. When they had cleared the quay and its outwork of huge pudding-stone boulders, she set the boat's head westward, rounding the extreme point of the ridge whose back they had crossed before descending the common stair of the tenement-house. In five minutes they were half across the bay where Trethewy had first landed, and pointing for the next headland.

"See!" said Lady Mary, waving her handkerchief upward

towards the Villa Parecchia. "There's Blanche, looking at us. She's a dear."

"Yes," said the doctor. "And she's happy."

"Because I'm better? Yes," Mary answered. "But I don't call that much of a happiness."

"If it's all she has—" he began.

"If it's all she's got," interrupted Lady Mary, "it's a shame. I'm happy—she's happy—both of us about me being well again. And neither of us would have been happy if I'd never been ill. That's funny, isn't it, Dr Trethewy?"

Trethewy admitted the funniness, and was proceeding to some trite remarks on the interdependence of good and evil, when Mary interrupted him.

"Of course," she said, "though it makes us both happy, there's a difference. To see me like this makes Blanche quite content. But I want something more."

"What's that?" asked Trethewy.

The girl's face became suddenly grave, and she looked at him with puzzled eyes.

"I wish I knew," she said. "But I don't—except, of course, IT," she added, smiling once more.

The boat had rounded a second point; Villa Parecchia and its bay were hidden from their backward glance. Camolino, with the short, digging stroke of the fisherman, was rowing up an inlet of the sea much narrower than the last. Along much of this coast the water is deep up to the very shore; but here, as in the harbour of Porto Finaggio itself, there was at the end of the arm a strip of white, gently shelving sand. The boat took ground while there were yet some yards of shallow water to traverse. Camolino slipped over the side, up to his knees in the clear green sea, pulled the lightened boat a few feet further in, and then carried in his arms first his mistress, and then the fat little doctor to the dry sand.

Lady Mary dismissed him, and they stood a few minutes on the beach, watching him thrust his boat off and paddle her seaward again.

Then Mary turned her back to the sea.

"Now for IT," she cried.

Some fifteen feet above them ran the virgin carriage road, raised, as the ground dipped at the head of the narrow bay, upon supporting walls of heavy masonry. The short viaduct was cleft in the centre to allow escape to the mountain torrent, now reduced to a mere thread of clear water, trickling beneath

the stone bridge. Its single arch framed for them, as they turned from the sea, a picture new to the doctor's eye. An elongated amphitheatre of hills, with the almost empty river-bed of grey stones for its arena; the hills cut almost everywhere on their lower slopes into stone-supported terraces; the terraces planted with as many olive trees as their soil will nourish, clothing the hill-side, even above the highest point to be seen through the arch, with the sad-green vesture of their leaves.

In the brilliance of the sunshine which fell in the foreground of this peep-hole picture, beyond the shadow of the arch which lent to it that strange, mysterious charm of the frame, the melancholy of the olive was scarcely felt. And down there, where the coarse, tall grass and canes have made an invasion of the shameless stones, at the first of those sharp bends in the stream's channel, which follows the low, inner spurs of the converging hills—down there is a great patch—a field, it seems—of crimson anemones, glowing, waving and splendid. The same delicate breeze from the sea which sets these giant flowers nodding, will now and again gather energy for a raid up the hill-side, marking its nomadic course with streaks and splashes of dull silver among the olives, as they turn up in momentary protest the lining of their leaves.

But it was at the moment just before the picture ceased to be a picture that it reached perfection. As Trethewy followed his guide under the arch, the blue broke upon him over the highest and furthest hill. He knew it was the blue that he had missed. But with the next step his picture was gone, being now, since he was in it, a place in which he had to follow a very eager and active young woman over rough stones and up steep places.

Forgetting his shorter stride and longer years, Mary ran lightly over the stones of the river-bed toward the left side of the valley, until she came to the foot of a path which rose steeply between the terraces. Up this she went, and Trethewy heavily after her, admiring while he envied the grace and strength with which she mounted.

At last she stood upon the backbone of the ridge separating the valley they had just left from that wider valley and rounder bay where stood the Villa Parecchia.

Trethewy reached her side, panting.

"I've admired your action, young woman," he said, "quite long enough. If there is further to go, we will travel together."

The path turned to the right, inland and upward along the ridge. After some ten minutes' walking at Trethewy's pace, he cried out suddenly in admiration.

"I thought you'd say 'Oh!'," exclaimed Lady Mary.

Trethewy found himself on the edge of an almost level piece of ground, overshadowed by a grove of magnificent chestnuts. Advancing among the trees, which were planted so wide apart as to let grass grow between them, he looked down to his left through their stems and over the tops of tier below tier of olives to the shining blue of the waters overlooked by Lady Blanche's villa.

He turned to his guide, and said, with a comprehensive wave of the hand:

"If this be IT, it is worth coming to see."

"This," said the girl, with a gesture of mimicry, "is but the costly setting of the jewel. IT is there."

Trethewy's eyes followed the pointing finger, and saw, at the further end of the grove, in a space of the thinning trees, with none to the north of it, an exotic wooden building, deserted and forlorn. It could be called neither *chalet* nor bungalow, was obviously not many years old, and seemed unlikely to become so.

"That," said Lady Mary, "is what I want you to get for me."

And with the eagerness of desire she told him how it had been built as a studio for a German artist, dead now more than a twelvemonth; how it belonged to the man from whom Blanche rented the villa which lay a long tortuous mile below; how they could buy it and the studio for a sum that seemed to Trethewy very small; how, if he could not sell it, the owner would cut down the grove, pull down the building, and plant olives. For this, he said, would pay him better than the occasional chance of letting the studio; and the chestnuts ought never to have been left there so long in a good sunny spot.

"You find them mostly in the shady parts, where the olives will bear very little fruit," the girl explained. "I've asked Blanche to buy it for me out of my money, or lend me the money till I'm of age, and she only laughs at me. And I want it, doctor," she went on, clasping her hands. "I feel as if the place were mine already, and as if somebody were trying to rob me of it. I love it, and it is mine. And I promise, oh! I promise to get well—really well for ever, if I may have it to paint in, and sit in and dream in next year. I believe I should

really learn to paint here. And, oh! Dr Trethewy, do—please do!”

“I’ll do what I can,” he answered.

“You might say that I shall die if I don’t have it,” suggested the girl. “Blanche believes everything you tell her.”

Trethewy gazed at her flushed and eager face with amusement.

“I make my fibs probable,” he replied. “But IT shall be yours, Lady Mary, if I can get it for you.”

As they started for home, she turned for one more look round the grove of her desire.

“It looks more beautiful than ever,” she said softly, “now that I begin to hope I shall get it.”

After twenty minutes of a winding descent, which led them at first inland on the other side of the ridge, and then ran suddenly down upon the back of the Villa Parecchia, they reached home.

“I can do it alone in a quarter of an hour,” said Mary, as Trethewy looked at his watch. “When will you tackle Blanche? After dinner?”

“It depends on the dinner,” he answered.

The dinner must have been good, for when they walked on the terrace after it in the moonlight, and he found himself alone with his hostess, Trethewy did tackle her, and his patient had her desire. In gaining his main point he even pressed his advantage so far as to advise immediate purchase.

“Then,” he said, “you can stay a month longer, and if it gets too hot down here in the valley, you can spend most of the day, and perhaps even the nights up there on the ridge, under the chestnut trees.”

A week later he left them, proud of his diplomacy and his patient. Lady Blanche knew nothing of the diplomacy, but joined with her sister in gratitude and praise.

And Mary, before they left Italy for their summer in England, had her new house in order, and even began there the painting of a quite impossible picture.

Late in the October of 1879 the sisters returned to Porto Finaggio. Throughout the summer, Blanche’s determination to obey Trethewy had stood firm, but Mary’s had wavered. And the elder had blessed him again and again for making her buy what she had called the silly summer-house in the chestnut wood. For when Mary would object that she was strong as any horse, and declare she would be happier at home, Blanche

would remind her of her studio on the hill, and the argument was at an end. She gave all the credit to the Cornishman's superhuman wisdom, in providing an antidote to the mild gaieties of semi-emancipation which had formed the first half of his new prescription.

For Mary's skirts were long, her hair was "up"; she had seen plays and pictures; had heard music and played lawn-tennis; had used her youth as excuse to get up early for cub-hunting, and her burden of nearly seventeen years to plead her right to more than one quiet dance. Blanche loved her, if possible, more devotedly than before, and thought all the change in her for the better, as indeed did many others. Old Colonel Le Dane began to take an interest in the girl he had thought dull, if not stupid; and, when Mary added her persuasions to Blanche's rather perfunctory proposal that her husband should accompany them to Italy, he surprised them both by consenting.

"You'll be glad of an old man," he said, speaking to his wife, but looking at her sister, "to keep off the young ones."

Afterwards, Lady Blanche requested him, not without severity, to avoid such remarks in future.

"She's not seventeen yet," she said. "It's no good putting ideas into girls' heads."

"She looks three and twenty. But those ideas come of themselves, my dear," he said, "when they come at all."

So the old man went with them, and Mary was glad of his company. He left them before the end of the year, alarmed for his seat by the imminence of the General Election, which took place in the March of 1880. His success kept him at Westminster, but Mary regretted him less than she had expected. For her little kingdom of the chestnuts had proved more to her even than she had hoped. There, without fatigue, she could daub and think it painting, brood and think it thinking, dream and think herself awake. She grew there to such health as was never to leave her; and she knew that the health was hers. But in those two seasons she grew also to the womanhood of which she became conscious only when they were past.

CHAPTER II

FROM CORSICA

IN the late spring of the year 1880, Randolph Bethune found himself in Corsica and near the end of his money. Unless some extraordinary chance should increase his store, the end of his nearly two years' wandering on the seas and solid fringes of the Mediterranean was not far.

He sat outside his dirty little inn, smoking, and debating good-humouredly with himself what next to do. The coarse cigarette grew short too quickly, and he dropped it with a cheerful oath and a shake of his burnt fingers. He felt in the pockets of his jacket for another. Finding none, he rose and crossed the hot street to buy more. At the counter of the little shop he changed a napoleon, and came back to his seat counting the change. Seated, he drew out and counted the rest of his money.

"Enough to get home, and no more," he thought. And then, "I wonder why I think of London as home?" he mused.

It was a question he could not answer, for at that moment the thought of London was a thought of horror to him.

"Is it because I can always make some money there—enough to live? No. Fleet Street for work, and Camden Town to sleep in—that isn't living."

Home or none, he saw very plainly that London it must be. He broke open the new packet of cigarettes, and went into the inn for a match. The landlord gave him a light, and they talked.

Bethune found that he must walk twenty miles, and wait perhaps ten days for a steamer to Genoa; unless, indeed, he could get to Calvi before eight o'clock the next morning.

"Can't I get a horse or a carriage?" he asked.

The landlord had seen him counting his money. Conveyance, he said, was to be had at a price. He even, under pressure, gave the price—the very lowest.

"And the steamer—what will she run me in?" asked Bethune, in fluent and fairly accurate Corsican equivalents.

The fare would be so much, the landlord said; and Bethune grinned rather ruefully. About money or its lack he had never all his life any sense of shame, and he now told the landlord that the golden sands were running out through the everlasting hole in the wrong end of his pocket. The Corsican smiled and pointed to Bethune's cigarette hand, which pen and pencil had made permanently his left.

If the gentleman was short of money, the landlord could, no doubt, get him passage to some point on the Italian coast at a price merely nominal; but there was always the ring, he said, for greater comfort.

Bethune was annoyed. For he wore on his finger a single diamond of considerable value. Some boyish vow had kept it on the only finger he could pass through its ring, ever since his frail old mother had forced it over the last knuckle, two days before she died. He was accustomed to turn the blazing stone inward; and he knew that the jewel was incongruous with the almost tattered Norfolk suit and the native boots which he wore. His wanderings, he thought, should have rubbed off him all traces of the class to which he did not wish to belong. But he could not forego the daily shave, and the keen face with its penetrating, deep-set eyes betrayed him more inevitably than the diamond. For the stone, once seen, was referred to the wearer's countenance.

He replied quietly to the landlord that the ring was a relic.

"Of some saint?" asked the landlord, his eye twinkling.

"I think so," said Bethune gravely; and the landlord's twinkle spread. More gravely still, Bethune corrected him with fact, and the smile left the man's face and the hat his head.

With still an occasional glance at the three closed fingers of his guest's left hand, the landlord then told him of the fish-boat which was sailing that night for Nice, and offered to introduce him to the *padrone*.

And so, eleven hours later, Bethune found himself lying in the moonlight, with nothing but some sacks and his great Corsican cape to soften the deck planks of the nautical non-descript which was to carry him cheaply over the first stage of his expensive journey to the stuffy bed-room in Camden Town. In this light, with nothing but himself and the huge, pointing finger of the lateen sail between the two dark, ineffable blues, below and above—between the clear, warm silver crescent of the moon above, embracing and overlapping the dark but

perfectly distinct completion of its circle, and the shimmering, broken arc of Diana beneath—here Camden Town seemed an absurdity. Yet none the less he knew that here he was because Camden Town was there, and he must get to it. His, however, was the temper of mind which endures Camden and other towns the better for entertaining no very intimate belief in them while the path offers better things than its end. Intellectual acceptance must combine with spiritual conviction for the making of faith. To-night Bethune's intelligence accepted Camden Town and all its neighbours; but his faith was in the brown, tapering triangle which pointed from the moon that shivered to the moon that was still.

He had offered the master of the boat extra money to land him at any one of the little ports to the west of Spezzia. That strip of coast was new to him, and he had promised himself the tramp into Genoa. He was not a little surprised by the smiling alacrity with which his offer of a modest fifteen francs was accepted, but attributed it to the poverty of the fisherman and the unhurried commerce of the region.

If the light wind held in its present quarter, they would put him ashore, said the *padrone*, at Chiavari, or near it, some time on the following afternoon. For a two-masted lateen-rigged craft is at her best before the wind, and the breeze was to-night from the south-west.

Bethune watched the tall, pointed sail and the sky above it, until he slid off into dreams; and slept till he was awakened by a soft, brushing touch of fingers down the back of his left hand, which lay bare upon the bare planks. Young though he was, he was too old a traveller in strange places to leap to his feet or cry out. He did not even open his eyes, though he was at once broad awake under their closed lids. He remembered the landlord of the dirty inn. If it was his diamond the stealthy hand had been feeling for, no wonder they had been willing to take him cheap, and to go out of their course into less frequented waters. To show suspicion would but hasten matters, and every hour's delay should bring him nearer the Italian coast. So he contented himself with sighing lightly, like a sleeper disturbed but not aroused. A moment after he closed his left fist and rolled upon his side. But he did not sleep again.

From dawn, when the wind freshened, till two in the afternoon, when it fell dead calm, the crew of four men were busy handling the boat, and nothing definite occurred to strengthen

the passenger's suspicion of their honesty. They were almost at the end of the journey when the wind failed them. Fifteen miles would have seen them in Chiavari—two hours and a half, said the captain. Five or six miles would put them alongside the quay at Santa Caterina, he added; and set his three men to work at the two clumsy sweeps the felucca carried. Two hours of this labour under such a sun was more than enough for the three. For the skipper was too lazy, and Bethune, with the thought he had in his mind, too wise to lend a hand. The three wiped the streaming sweat from face and neck, the four cursed the land, the sea and the boat in rich patterns of profanity, and the five drank wine by turns from the neck of the same straw-covered flask. It was not, however, the same flask throughout. Bethune drank sparingly enough, and, from the glances he intercepted now and again, was glad to think that each abstinence counted two on a division.

He had taken a cautious look round. The little vessel was too small to carry a dinghy, and he was no longer afraid of the sweeps. The shore, by the crew's admission, was a bare three miles from where they lay, gently rolling on the long, oily swell; and only Bethune knew how Bethune could swim. But his best time, if the attempt must be made, was coming with the emptying of the flasks.

Suddenly the captain demanded his extra money.

Bethune replied, with careless good-humour, that it was not yet due. The captain insisted, and Bethune, admitting these things to be all one between gentlemen, offered him the fifteen francs.

The *padrone* indignantly declared that the extra charge agreed upon was forty francs. Bethune, avoiding the provocation to a quarrel, offered to play him for the difference.

The other three were all this time noisily amusing themselves with a pack of filthy cards. At the captain's request these were surrendered with ominous alacrity into Bethune's hands for a game he knew he must lose. This, could he but spend time enough in the losing, he was not unwilling to do; for his eye, alert with danger, had detected a slow but steady drift shoreward.

The captain knew his game, while filth and ill usage had made the backs of the familiar cards scarcely less legible to him than their spotted faces. Bethune lost, and found himself losing much quicker than he had intended. And still the

boat drifted, but more slowly than the franc-pieces from his pocket to the *padrone's*.

The forty francs were paid over. Bethune, with a show of reluctance and an eye of apparent unconcern upon the distant landmarks he had chosen to gauge the drift, allowed himself to be persuaded into a second game; and he calculated that each fifty yards of shoreward progress was costing him a hundred francs. For the game they had chosen at last was *mora*, and the other three rascals had joined them; and still the money went, and still Bethune delayed. A swim of three miles in water so warm as he hoped to find it, was no great undertaking to him. He had early in the day removed his heavy boots and woollen stockings with the excuse of bathing his feet in a bucket of sea water; and had kept them naked in imitation of the crew. If he should throw off his Norfolk jacket, he would have no clothes to impede him in the water but tweed knickerbockers and cotton shirt. But two considerations there were which made him willing to pay a high price for even a small reduction of the distance between the boat and the shore; he had assured himself from the faces and demeanour of the four men, which had been less carefully guarded since his losses at *mora* had begun to grow heavy, that they were in agreement to rob him, if they could not fleece him, of his one valuable possession. He feared, therefore, that there might be trouble before he entered the water; and, good swimmer though he was, he had no assurance that there was not a better on board.

At last he declared, with much calm and resolution, that he would play no more.

The three men murmured, and the captain asked his reason.

Bethune smiled, rose to his feet, and stretched himself.

"I have no more money," he said; "barely enough to buy a drink when I get ashore."

The captain pointed to his ring, and offered to buy it—for one hundred francs, if his passenger would continue playing. Bethune began to take off his coat, an action which puzzled the four, so entirely without haste or fear was it performed.

"My ring," he said, "is not for sale. I will play no more."

"If you have no money," cried the captain, "and will not part with the ring, how shall I be paid for your passage?"

"The price is in your pocket," replied Bethune. "I paid you when I came aboard."

The four, in clamorous chorus, denied that the *padrone* had been paid.

The *padrone* called his passenger *ladro*, and many other things, and felt for the knife at his waist. The perpendicular knuckles of Bethune's right fist took him with force and precision on the left corner of the chin, and the captain disappeared head first into the well of the boat only just before Bethune did the same into the sea from the port gunwale.

A scream of disappointed anger followed him from three throats, and the swimmer heard the end of it as he rose to the surface thirty feet away. He hoped it was all the pursuit they would attempt, but he had not swum another ten yards before the loud splash of an awkward dive told him that he must begin his work with a race. Now Bethune was a long-distance rather than a fast swimmer; but he had a fairly swift side-stroke, and for the space of some four or five minutes he now used it as never before. Then, anxious not to waste energy uselessly, he turned on his back, swimming only with his legs, and raised his head a little, looking towards the boat. The Corsican swam with terrific speed, twisting his body sideways at the end of each stroke, for the greater reach of the other arm in the next. Bethune, though he knew the man could not hold the pace for a quarter of a mile, yet doubted whether he himself, even with the lead he possessed, could keep away from him for two hundred yards, and judged it best to save his strength for the meeting and the swim to shore. He turned on his breast again, therefore, and began to swim slowly and heavily, as if already distressed. The Corsican came up rapidly, and the cries of his two shipmates rang over the water, as they cheered him on.

When he judged by the sounds behind him that his pursuer was near enough, Bethune turned and swam to meet him. The Corsican, when he saw the white face in the midst of the black, wet hair he had been pursuing, was taken aback for a moment, and slackened his pace. When they were barely two yards apart, Bethune disappeared. But in the very moment of diving, he saw the knife in the Corsican's hand. And as he took the man round the waist under water, he felt the sting of its point in the flesh of his shoulder. Under water the rascal was no match for the Englishman, and before he could use his knife again, Bethune's arms had forced from his lungs every drop of air. The mouth opened, and Bethune let go, driving the Corsican deeper with the thrust of his feet as he rose to the surface.

As soon as he got his bearings, he started with a long, steady breast-stroke for the hills that seemed so much further than they had shown from the deck of the boat behind him.

Thinking that his enemy's knife had but pricked his shoulder, Bethune was surprised as well as alarmed to find weariness creeping over him much sooner than experience had taught him to expect it. Before half the distance was covered, he wondered whether he would ever reach the shore. He told himself it was the heat of the sun beating down upon his head; and from time to time, for the next half-mile, was careful to keep his hair wet. Then thought left him—feeling and impression became confused. Automatically he still swam; and he must have had his senses more awake than his memory was able to record. For his direction to the coast remained true. His complete intelligence came back to him for a moment when he was very near the end of his journey. A little puff of wind struck his face with refreshment; he heard a splash, he thought, followed by a gently slapping sound of the water. His mind went back to the beginning of the swim, and he thought he heard the hands of his enemy striking the water, as he flung alternate arms beyond his head in pursuit. Stung to a small return of energy by fear of a struggle which must be this time without hope, he rolled with difficulty upon his back and looked about him. On each side were rocks, and the sounds he had heard might have been the lapping of the tiny waves against them. For a moment his mind was once more alert. A little way he could still swim, but he knew that he had no strength to pull himself out of the water upon even the lowest of those pudding-stone boulders. Swimming on, he would come to shoal-water. He turned to his breast-stroke again, raising his head a little, and saw in front of him the gleam of pale sand. He struck out in a last rally of his strength, and then the grey curtain fell over him once more.

A little further his knees touched the sand, and his feet, rather than the conscious man, found it.

Randolph Bethune stood erect, waded a few steps, uttered a sound between a gasp and a cry, and fell face downward in three inches of water.

CHAPTER III

OUT OF THE SEA

AS soon as she thought the weather, or, rather, the water warm enough, in this her second season at Porto Finaggio, Lady Mary Frozier had pitched her bathing-tent among those huge lumps of Nature's concrete which formed the point of the spur upon whose shank her chestnut trees cast their shade over her studio. And there the tent stood, tied and skewered with rope and iron, till Mary had done with it and with Porto Finaggio. Its floor was boarded and matted to a pleasant level above the uncompromising pudding-stone, and from its canvas-curtained entry ran a long, smooth plank, bolted to the rocks, and jutting four feet beyond their edge, overhanging the water. Within, a tiny dressing-table, a deck chair, a footbath and a hand-basin, a great copper vessel of fresh water and the huge bath-towels hanging from the swinging racks were all as clean and tidy as her old Italian devotee, trotting thither twice in the day, could keep them. Benedetta knew, but Benedetta, if she told, did not tell Lady Blanche, how often the bathing-dress was soaked, and dried on the rocks outside the tent; for Mary's love of the water was not to be satisfied with the regulation dip which the elder sister thought enough, and, but for Dr Trethewy, would have thought too much for "a delicate girl."

Mary, however, was no longer, in Blanche's sense of the word, delicate. Blanche herself might even have been induced, by pressure or Dr Trethewy, to admit so much. But she was a "growing girl"; and growth Lady Blanche Le Dane had been bred to regard as an unclassified form of disease.

Six weeks ago the phrase had roused The Growing Girl to revolt.

"I'm as big as I shall ever be, Blanche dear," she had said, laughing. "But growing's all right and healthy, isn't it? Or is it the chicken-pox of 'life's fitful fever'?"

But to-day Blanche was too far to interfere; and, in spite of the affection with which she repaid her sister's care and love, Mary was in holiday mood.

In the March of 1880 there had been a general election. Colonel Le Dane, in spite of ill health and advancing years, had fought what the wise had believed a losing battle with success, and had retained his seat. Success had made him happy, and he wrote that he was well. He had even said he would spend Easter at Porto Finaggio, and be with them on Mary's birthday. But that visit was given up, for reasons, Mary understood, of politics. At last Blanche discovered that it was his own and not his party's health which kept him from making the journey; and Mary was surprised to see her sister agitated as never before. Only the fear of distressing her husband kept her from going home at once. Before the first week of May, however, was over, hesitation was at an end. Blanche had a telegram from a distinguished London doctor. Colonel Le Dane had had a mild stroke of paralysis, and she sped to him as she had never hastened in his health.

Lady Blanche leaned out from the hot and stuffy first class carriage, while her train waited in the white glare of the Santa Caterina station until the arrival of the Rome express should clear the single track.

"Warfleet says *slight*, you know, darling," she repeated for the seventh time. "He'll be all right in a week or two, and then I'll come and fetch you. But the weather's been so bad at home, I can't take you with me. Trethewy says in his letter that the spring is only beginning even in Cornwall; and you'd better stay till June than leave now. Peters and Agne will take care of you, won't they?"

Now Peters was the butler, whose only fault was a pretty girl in the town; and Agnes was the elderly Scotswoman, known as Lady Mary's maid, since she could no longer be called her nurse. Agnes had no fault but the asthma which filled most of her time.

"And Benedetta," said Mary, tipping the little external brass latch of the carriage door in and out of its catch.

"And mind you don't do too much. You're growing still, child," said the childless woman.

"There won't be anything to do, Blanche," the girl replied. "And I don't mind doing it all the summer, if you'll leave me here."

"Don't sleep up at the studio," said Blanche, racking her brains for final prohibitions.

"But Dr Trethewy—" objected Mary.

"Oh, well—" rejoined Blanche, hesitating.

"Menelik's better than a policeman," said the younger sister.

"Much better," agreed the elder; for Menelik was Mary's Great Dane; a dog of terrible size and appearance, and of exquisite manners.

And then the east-bound train rumbled in. A toy trumpet told them the points were clear; the engine-driver left his game of bowls in the goods siding, the white, handsome, haggard face was pressed for a passionate moment to the girl's red lips and delicately tanned cheeks, and Mary was alone.

But as she walked quickly down to the quay, restraining an absurd inclination to run, she felt somehow less lonely than was her habit. This made her feel guilty, and she asked herself both why she felt no sorrier that Blanche was gone, and why she was ashamed. But before her self could answer, there was Camolino, clinging, with white-painted boat-hook to the grey stone quay, shining up at her with a welcome of gold ear-rings, black eyes and white teeth. The red cushions in the stern-sheets of the green and white boat had been freshly shaken to symmetrical obesity, and it seemed to the girl that even Camolino felt it was holiday.

Mary nodded to him, and then the thought of luncheon waiting for her at home brought a swift reminder of a commission forgotten. She darted across the broad quay to the butcher's shop beneath the dark stone arches, gave her order in smooth and rapid Italian, and hurried back to the boat.

"Pull hard, Camolino," she cried. "I'm dying of hunger."

And so she had given herself up to the sea and the hour, leaving introspection until after lunch.

And now, sitting in the shade of the last trees on the southern edge of the chestnut plantation, with hands clasped round her knees, and gazing out to sea between the tops of two giant olives whose roothold was two terraces below that of the chestnut she leaned against, Mary Frozier tried to arrange her thoughts.

"Poor Blanche!" they ran, while she believed herself guiding them. "She's all I've got, and I'm all she's got. Only she's content, and I want more; something that's more my own. I believe she forgets sometimes that she's not my mother—and we didn't even have the same one. We're not a bit like each other, really."

Into her field of vision over the sea there had glided, with the last force of the dying wind, a two-masted, lateen-rigged

boat. So far was it, that the tall, pointed sails were but two dark spikes, rising finger-like from the water.

"If she saw that boat, now, she'd never notice—never wonder where it came from, where it is going. If it was nearer, she'd just say it was pretty. Nothing is real to Blanche that's more than half a mile away. Oh, yes," she argued with her conscience, "I love my half of her, of course. But half of Blanche is the full extent of my human possessions. And the other half of her weighs on me so. It's like a sort of silly sham conscience, saying things are right or wrong by some absurd, unreasonable rule of its own."

The girl rose and stretched herself to her full height, spreading her arms above her head.

"So it's no wonder," she said to herself in conclusion, "if I *am* glad to be alone for a few days and forget that I'm a Growing Girl."

She looked round for her dog; but the great Menelik had affairs that afternoon of his own. She remembered that he had not followed her from the villa. She felt lonely, and went to her painting. But she had tried so hard to paint, and had tried so long, that it had begun to dawn upon her, being a young woman of some honesty, that her colour did not improve, and that her drawing had always been ridiculous; and to-day it was disheartening, if not foolish, to go on.

"It's like being in a hurry and finding yourself at a place where you must choose one road out of a dozen. You waste time if you stop, and more if you take a wrong one—and eleven of them are wrong. Besides, it's too lovely outside. And I simply can't get that *beastly* shoulder right."

For, though Lady Mary Frozier had the good fortune never to have been to school, she had nevertheless learned the true secret of bad language. In the seventies it was still wicked, in some nurseries and drawing-rooms, to say "beastly"; and Mary, being a good girl, had said it so seldom that she still found it efficacious to relieve.

So she gave up the struggle with the arm that was certainly not yet human; grabbed, with a delicious sense of reckless luxury, at her morocco-bound Longfellow, and her even more gorgeous satin-covered chocolate-box, and rolled into her hammock. The hammock was hung between two of her great chestnuts; and there, for nearly two hours, she lay, the hammock swaying gently now and again as she turned a leaf, or fumbled, without taking her eyes from the page, for another caramel.

At last, whether it was Longfellow or the chocolate that palled, she rose, let down her hair, and with swift fingers twisted it into the plaited pigtail of two years ago. Then she looked round for something to tie it with; caught sight of the gorgeous box lying in the hammock, seized the end of the shining rope in her teeth, fetched from her pocket a knife like a schoolboy's, and cut from the violet ribbon which had secured her sweetmeats enough for her need; turned up the uneven ends of the hair, and tied the ribbon with a savage little jerk round the loop.

And then, with that splendid tail hanging and her head covered with a rough straw which took different shape with each putting-on, she made for the sea, whose waters, if hardly cool, were always wet with refreshment. She ran through the chestnut-wood southward, by the path she had ascended more than a year ago with Dr Trethewy, until she reached the head of the steep and direct descent through the terraces to the valley; which was now, as then, a valley of dry stones. She thought of the man who had done so much for her; even stood a moment reflecting, and looking down at the dry bed of the potential torrent. In a diary—in any spoken or written description—her life to-day would seem little different from the life she had led at Porto Finaggio the year before. The river-bed down there was still dry; nay, rather, it was dry again, and the dryness looked like the same dryness. And her life, though it might seem to others but last year's extended and unchanged, was to her and in truth a life utterly different from the old; like the valley, it had felt many rains fall and cover its stones with the gathered volume of the drops fallen upon it and outside it. She thought within herself that her little storms had filled her channel to the banks. But, being young and sometimes thoughtful, she was given to pushing simile and metaphor until they fell over the edge of absurdity.

"Where are the banks?" she asked, looking down upon the slender, gleaming thread of water, trickling slowly through the stone arch to the sea; and her eye rose curiously to the almost bald summit of the opposite hill. Her hand, palm downwards, with fingers slightly apart and lifted first, followed the eye.

"I should like mine," she murmured, "to fill up to there."

After which aspiration, she wanted the wetness more than ever; but she did not take the path to the river-bed and under the stone viaduct. Early in the season, foreseeing the frequency of her visits to the shore, she had devised a shorter way.

For the road from Santa Caterina, as you drew near to

Porto Finaggio after passing the bridge at the sandy head of the rock-lined cove, crossed, through a deep cutting in the rock, the tapering spur of Lady Mary's ridge, some sixty yards inland of its extreme point. At this point were her tent and spring-board; and, but for the cutting of that road, Lady Mary could have scrambled directly down the spine of her ridge to the sea. There had, indeed, been a rough, foot-worn track before the new road came to divide it with a drop of twenty feet. When she had first followed this track to the abrupt interruption, there had stood a few long and ragged pine-trees beside the path, on the very verge of the artificial cliff. But as she reached the place this afternoon, only one, and that the raggedest and meanest of the four, survived to mark the site of their mediocre dignity.

The other three lay across the chasm of the road, spanning the cut, and forming the bridge of Lady Mary's imaginative desire. For it was still the bridge rather than the shortness of the way which drew her every day by the shorter path to her tent. Seventeen though she was, and two and twenty though she appeared, Mary Frozier had, up to this day at least, as good and healthy girls should have, something of the boy in her. In this matter of the bridge, indeed, her one regret had been that she was not allowed to do the felling with her own hands. A cunning little *contadino* had first, after much persuasion, sold her the trees; next, his labour to cut them down; and, when they had fallen into place, had successfully sprung upon her an exorbitant toll for a right of way none had ever disputed, until it had been interrupted by the joint enterprise of two municipalities. There had been times in the previous season, indeed, when returning health and the novelty of climate and scenery had given her a longing for activity even more adventurous than the use of a woodman's axe; she needed a brother somewhat younger than herself to play at pirates with her. Dr Trethewy, unfortunately, had not taken up his abode with these variant half-sisters, or she would have been reading Marryat, George Cupples, Michael Scott and Charles Reade, instead of Longfellow, Rossetti and Lewis Morris, with dips into Byron. These did no harm; but those would have done her good.

When all is said, however, the girl was neither tom-boy nor precocious sentimentalist; but merely a young woman of the upper class, physically and mentally developed five years in advance of her experience and education. Porto Finaggio

had opened a new page of nature for her, and had so saved her from being bored. But Porto Finaggio, if it had so far refrained from asking new questions, had certainly answered none of the old.

As she ran over the undressed pine trunks, scarcely touching with her hand the rail which her sister had insisted upon adding to the primitive structure, she still had something of the old thrill of delight in her bridge. If it was no longer a transit to fill her with daydreams of adventure—if that Saracen pirate galley had months ago grown weary of waiting down there at the foot of the rocks—it was nevertheless still amusing. And one can always remember with secret pleasure how childish he used to be in secret—three months ago. The superiority of seventeen years over sixteen and nine months may in fact be inconsiderable. In reality, however, it is full of consolation.

Things would have befallen with circumstantial, and possibly with material difference that afternoon, if Lady Mary had been less eager for her bath. For she snatched up the two halves of her swimming-dress, lying hot between rocks and sun, and dashed into the tent without a glance over the water. With boyish haste she stripped off her clothes, and wished, while she was pinning up the heavy, auburn rope of her pigtail and fitting over it the hated oilskin cap, that, like a boy, she might enjoy intimate contact with the sea. How often had she envied the brown urchins, who already sat half through the hot day, burning their skins browner on the quays, and cooling them ever and again with a plunge, feet foremost and nose tight-gripped, into the pale-green water, clear even in the harbours?

The oilskin cap was hardly adjusted when she heard, as if at some distance from her rock, a sound of hard breathing, and the faint splutter of water blown from invaded lips.

"That's Menelik," she thought. "He's clever. He's seen the tent-flap down, from the other side; and he's swimming across. I wonder where the dear old naughty thing has been."

And yet the sound, which was not repeated, did not seem altogether like the dog's. So Lady Mary dressed herself for the water before looking out. By the time that she could lift the canvas she had forgotten she had heard anything. Looping the curtain as high as it would go, she retreated to the back of the tent, thus gaining two yards for her run to the end of the spring-board. And then with a flash of arms white

against the dark tunic, as fast as the strong, slender white feet would carry the straight young body longing for the water, she ran; and left the end of the plank with a lift and a perfect descending curve, continued beneath the concealing water. There were, however, no eyes to hide from. For the man whose head she would have seen had she glanced shoreward, had eyes but for the end of the journey.

As she rose to the surface, determined upon landing at once and repeating the plunge, she turned her eyes to a point inshore of the spring-board, where the climb from the water to the rocks was easier; and saw the round black ball of the exhausted swimmer's head, fifty yards nearer the sand than she was herself. Curious, she swam towards it; but before she was assured whether it were indeed a head, Bethune staggered to his feet.

Lady Mary checked her pursuit. Then the man fell, as has been told, prone in the shallow water; and the girl, stung with the terror of death, flashed shoreward with a speed her side-stroke had never before attained. So tightly had fear seized her by the throat, so spasmodically galvanised were the thrust of her legs and the over-stroke of the right arm, that when, after seconds which seemed hours, she stood beside the man who was drowning in a few inches of water, her bosom was heaving, her eyes dimmed and her head in a whirl. But fear still drove her. With a violent effort she turned him over, and, in blind terror of the water which could no longer hurt him, she seized the limp hands in hers, right to right and left to left, and dragged the long, dead-seeming body well up on the hot white sand. This done, she fell, or, rather, sat with violence beside it, and wept. The collapse was perhaps more accidental than voluntary; for Bethune with his water-logged clothes was no light weight to pull over even a few feet of the yielding sand; and, just at the last, his wet left hand had slipped through her wet fingers.

Ashamed of tears, she drew deep breaths, controlling her confused emotion. Something hard lay in her left palm. She raised her hand as if to toss a pebble into the sea—and checked the action but just in time. The glare of gold and the flash of a large diamond filled her eyes. Now Lady Mary Frozier knew a diamond when she saw it. She had not a few of her own; but, being a woman and a reasonable being, she loved her sister's diamonds best. For Lady Blanche's jewels were justly famous.

She was still admiring the stone, when a faint fluttering sigh came from Bethune's lips. She slipped the ring over her largest finger, and leaned forward to look at its owner.

But upside down a face is as hard to read as print. So she rose and turned her back to the sea, looking down on the man she had saved.

She knew he had not been long enough with his face in the water to drown. More than once she had seen a woman in a faint; she recognised the half-closed eye-lids, whose narrow opening showed only the white of the eye-ball. She stooped and laid her hand on the wet cotton shirt where she thought the heart should be; and at last she found its beat. After Blanche had fainted, for the first time in Mary's presence, the girl had asked Trethewy what she must do for her sister, should this happen again.

"Lay her flat on her back," he had answered. "No pillow, mind. If she don't come round pretty quick, give her brandy."

There was no brandy nearer than the studio. His head was as low as possible. No, it was not; for the shore sloped sharply from the water's edge to the foot of the viaduct. So she seized him under the arms and twisted the body round till the feet pointed to the hills.

"Perhaps that'll bring the blood back to his head," she murmured.

Then she fell upon his left hand and arm, rubbing it with the effective cruelty of fingers coated with sand. Bethune sighed again, this time with more volume. A brilliant redness of abrasion appeared on the left arm. Lady Mary, feeling that as life returned skin became more valuable, transferred her operations to the other. She had done little damage when Bethune tried to sit up.

Exhaustion, however, and his sloping position were too much for him. He fell back, his head striking the sand with a soft thud.

And when he laughed, Lady Mary Frozier was shocked.

CHAPTER IV

SALVAGE

IT was a feeble laugh enough. But there was in it an unmistakable quality of humour, and to the girl's tense feeling of the moment, humour seemed out of place.

"There's nothing to laugh at," she said, rather crossly.

Bethune raised his head a little with the help of his right arm. It was only a glimpse that he caught of her before the elbow gave, and he fell back again. All he had seen was a drawn, frightened oval face, surmounted by a tight, ugly cap.

"My good chap," he said faintly, but unable to restrain a second chuckle, "I'm glad you're English. But, if you want your share of a joke, you should ask for it, not cut up rough because you haven't the tip."

Lady Mary was ashamed of her asperity; and, although she knew it was all that horrid oilskin cap, she was pleased—to herself she said "amused"—in being taken for a boy. She seized his left arm again, and, rubbing it vigorously above the part she had already flayed, tried to give a masculine flavour to her voice.

"Tell us the joke, then," she said, gruffly.

"It's only the string of my luck," Bethune replied. "I was done brown in Corsica; on the sea the fishermen fleeced me and tried to rob me; and now in Samaria I'm having my third and final cuticle charitably rubbed off my arm."

Mary dropped the arm as if it had been indeed the hot coal it seemed to its owner, and rose to her feet.

"Did I hurt you?" she asked with contrition, forgetting her pretence. "You've been trying to sit up."

He tried again, murmuring that he felt horribly weak.

"Your head's downhill—that's all," said Mary. "I'll help you."

So she knelt at his head, scooping her arms through the sand beneath his shoulders, and lifted him to a sitting posture.

He felt her chin touch his shoulder from behind, and the soft pressure of her bosom against his back.

"You're a good—chap," he said, rubbing his left hand over his eyes.

"I—I suppose I ought to tell you that I'm not," said Mary.

"Not what?" asked Bethune.

"I'm not a boy," said Mary.

"I knew that," he replied, "directly you tried to speak like one."

"Then why," asked the girl, "did you say 'chap' again?"

"Well," answered Bethune, "I'm not absolutely certain the word isn't of the common gender. Anyhow, I thought I'd wait till you corrected me. But I shall tire you out, leaning against you like this. I'm better."

With an effort and the help of her hand he got to his feet. He felt himself almost overpowered with the painless lethargy which comes of exhaustion in the water. He stood for a moment, and then swayed as if he would have fallen again. But the girl caught him by the arm.

"Thanks," he said. "If you don't mind holding on to me, I think I can get to the shadow there, under that rock. I'm rather knocked out of time, you know," he added apologetically, "and I can't stand the sun."

Clinging to her arm, he advanced a few steps; then swayed again, more perilously than before.

"I want some holding up, don't I?" he said, with a painful attempt at jocularity; and he clutched her shoulder with his free hand.

Lady Mary was frightened; but she was one of those from whose heads fear does not drive the wits. Somehow, with an arm round his waist, she got him into the shadow of the hill, and managed to drop him upon the sand so that he sat with his back against the rock.

There she left him leaning, with head thrown backward and eyes closed, while she sped to her tent, leaping from boulder to boulder along the rough, western side of the tiny bay. She snatched up the cushion from her chair, and a large bath-towel, and was wishing for the flask of brandy which, in fear of Blanche and her faintings, she kept in her studio; when her eye fell upon a wicker-covered bottle of *eau de Cologne*. With cork unpierced, it had stood upon her dressing-table since her sister had left it there for an external corrective of the various ills which her old-fashioned superstition ascribed to immersion in cold water. Mary added this bottle to her burden; but when she had filled a tumbler with fresh water by dipping it into the big copper vase, she found that she must readjust her burden, or return to her patient more slowly than

she ought. For the glass of water needed two hands. She loosed the second button of her tunic, and slipped the bottle between it and her skin, so that it sagged to her waist, its weight bumping and its wicker envelope rasping as she ran. With one hand holding and the other palm tightly covering the glass of water, towel and cushion squeezed between her arms and sides, she reached the place where Bethune leaned against the rock.

He opened his eyes a little as she moved him, but let the lids fall again with a sigh of relief as he felt the soft comfort of the cushion at his back.

A sight sufficiently absurd they must have furnished, had there been any to see; the tall, bare-legged girl, with her flimsy and ungraceful knickerbockers and tunic, wet and clinging unequally to her body, revealing here, and there belying its shape; her pale face wrinkled with anxiety, her eyes wide with fear; and the whole crowned with that hideous oilskin cap; while the man, with blue lips and cheeks of death's yellowish white, his only garments a blue cotton shirt and sodden knickerbockers of tweed cloth, lay back and breathed heavily, as if with the pain which dogs the return of consciousness. But none saw the tragi-comedy. For to-day was *festa* in Porto Finaggio as well as in Santa Caterina and many another honey-comb of humanity; and to-day the road that must wait so long for wheels rested even from the pad, the clink and the shuffle of flesh, iron and leather.

The sun burned; the cicala's soft shrilling was multitudinous. The sweetness and the languor of earth and of sea met and mixed on the white sand of the little bay-head; and Lady Mary's desire for a corkscrew blotted out from her perception not only the beauty and the arid softness of Nature about her, but even her own uncouth condition.

She set down the glass, pressing it into the sand for safety. Then she dragged the long scent-flask from its improvised pocket; failed in an attempt almost frantic to push the cork from the neck into the body of the vessel, and, seizing a stone, used it to knock off the head. Even now she had not gained her end, for the wicker held; and when at last she had torn neck from bottle, she must throw out some of the spirit to wash away the splinters of glass.

She next half emptied her tumbler, filling it again to the brim with the *eau de Cologne*. Then she got her arm behind him, lifted his head and put the cloudy stuff to his lips.

Bethune opened his eyes at the scent and taste.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Something you've got to drink," said Lady Mary. "Oh, please do!"

With two gulps and a gasp he got it down. Then he said it was nasty, speaking in his weakness like a child.

"I hope it will do you good," said Mary, watching the colour come back to his face. "I'm sorry it wasn't brandy."

He leaned forward from the rock and looked at her with reason, gratitude and inquiry in his eyes.

His gaze brought the blood to her cheeks and forehead more quickly than the alcohol was fetching his. For the first time Mary remembered how she was clothed.

"You've been saving my life, haven't you?" asked Bethune. "Did you pull me out of the sea?"

"Out of six inches of it," she replied, fastening the loose button of her tunic. And she told him all she knew of his adventure.

"And now," she said in conclusion, "I'll go and dress. I must look a perfectly awful sight."

Bethune laughed kindly.

"Then there's a pair of us," he said. "And you, at least, were dressed for your occupation. But I can't think," he added, "why I should go and faint at the end of a three-mile swim. I've often done twice as much, and been as fit as paint after it."

He moved as if to rise; but Mary stopped him.

"You're not to stir," she said imperiously, "till I come back. But you're not comfortable. If you could sit a little closer to the rock, I'm sure you'd like it better."

Bethune set his palms against the sand, straightened his elbows, and lifted himself nearer to his support. Her right hand, as he made this effort, was against his right shoulder-blade. When he leaned heavily back against the cushion, she drew her hand free with some exertion of strength, rather than make him move again to release her.

The fingers felt sticky.

"Why!" she cried, astonished as she regarded them, "it's blood!"

"Where?" asked Bethune.

"All over my hand," said the girl. "I wonder how I cut myself."

"Most likely it's mine," said the man. "I thought I felt

his knife. And then I forgot it with all the rest. That accounts for my being so absurdly tucked out."

"What d'you mean? Who stabbed you?" asked Mary, frightened.

"My good Samaritan," said Bethune, "if you'll go and dress, I'll tell you all about it the moment you come back."

"But you might bleed to death while I'm gone," said Mary.

"Oh, no," he replied. "If it had been bad, I should never have come ashore. Do go—there's a good child."

The "good child" settled it. Before he knew what she was about, Mary had his right arm out of its shirt-sleeve, and in another moment had found the wound—a ripped gash half an inch deep and about four inches long, running from the crown of the shoulder down the inner edge of the shoulder-blade. From this cut Bethune had no doubt lost much blood till exhaustion and the salt water had checked its flow.

Lady Mary was for binding the wound at once; Bethune flatly declined to be touched until she was dressed. A compromise was effected. Bethune lay back with the bath-towel folded small and packed between his shoulder and his shirt; and Mary ran down to the sea, intending to swim to her clothes for the quicker hiding of her ungainliness. In her sudden desire for concealment, which grew with every step the moment her back was turned to him, she flopped into nine-inch water rather than wade till she could dive. Bethune watched her go; and he was surprised to see how well she travelled through the water, after that schoolgirl fashion of meeting its embrace.

"She swims too well to dive like that," he thought. "Poor child! I believe she tumbled in to hide herself, before it was deep enough for a header."

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE CHESTNUTS

UNTIL she returned, he did not stir. How long she was away he did not know. For he fell into a pleasant stupor from which he was aroused by the approaching swish of a skirt.

She came by the way over which she had fetched the cushion and the *eau de Cologne*. But that time he had not seen her come; and this time he did not at first believe it was she who came.

Under a hat of rough native straw, moulded into dainty curves by clever fingers and long pins, he saw a face more serenely charming than any other he had seen or was to see. Between the face and the hat were the extravagant frontiers of a lover's kingdom of hair. Quick though she had been, Mary Frozier had found time to do it temporary justice. For she felt herself, by reflection, something of a heroine. Had she not rescued, and was she not tending, a man that had been stabbed? For at least two months she had abandoned thought of that Tunisian Corsair; and here it was—he was—they were. Anyhow, it came to the same thing—something had happened at last. And it could not be denied that the something was interesting. It did, indeed, occur to her that the man was likely to prove a scamp. But he was English, and seemed a gentleman. But, then again, the wicked men in the books so often were or seemed to be gentle.

It was at least exciting; and there was no doubt that hair well dressed must, by increasing dignity, reduce the risk of impertinence. She took care so to dress it and herself that he should not again address her as "child."

He could not take his eyes from her face; but till she drew near and spoke, he did not know her.

She asked if he were better; and his gaze, as he replied that he was better, expressed so frank a surprise at her identity with the good Samaritan whom at first he had mistaken for a lad of fifteen, that Lady Mary laughed aloud.

"You didn't know me," she exclaimed.

"Until you spoke," he admitted, "I thought you were somebody else."

"I'm glad there's no resemblance," said the girl. "Please forget the other one."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Bethune, smiling up at her.

"Was she so very dreadful?" asked Mary.

"She was too kind to be forgotten, poor lady," he replied.

Lady Mary's brows drew together a little, and her face stiffened.

"Why do you pity her?" she asked coldly.

"Because her successor in office is so down upon her," he answered.

Her face cleared.

"That means I've got to be kind too," she remarked.

"I'm sure you're going to be," he answered.

Lady Mary drew nearer.

"Then I'd better begin," she responded, merrily, with yet something of hesitation in her manner.

"That's the one thing you can't do," said Bethune. "I'm even puzzled to know how you'll contrive to go on."

"By tying up that awful cut in your shoulder," said Lady Mary. "It's the first thing to be done."

Bethune, reading her face easily enough, perceived that she was now more shy of handling him than she had been before; being herself well and prettily dressed, she felt as if her comfort and propriety were a possible offence to the poor draggled, wounded and half-clothed fellow-creature she wished to help. This, at least, is the interpretation which Bethune put upon her diffidence.

"I'm all right," he cried cheerfully. "There's no need for you to do more for me. In fact, I believe I can't do better than sit here till dark. The wound will harden meanwhile, and at night I can sneak comfortably into a village or a town and get it seen to."

"Not this village," said Mary. "There isn't anything fit to be called a doctor in the place."

"What is the place?" asked Bethune.

"Have you fallen from the moon?" cried the astonished girl.

"No," said Bethune. "I've only tumbled out of Corsica—a place they know much less about. It's old-fashioned. They grow pirates in Corsica. I came a good part of the way in one of their galleys."

This surprising information, coming so soon after those

flitting ghosts of her dead fancies, made Mary's eyes look wider and larger, if it did little to open them. A pink flush rose to her face. How the man would laugh, if he knew that this very afternoon, as she ran down to the sea, she had remembered her old dream romance of the Carthaginian galley! Yet here he was—a strange man—a possible man, at least to talk with and to do things for—speaking of these very things as if—notwithstanding a touch of irony in the corners of his mouth—as if they were fact. She saw that her heightened colour had not escaped him, and rushed into the business of the moment.

"That is nonsense—about waiting till dark, and not having it bound up," she said. "Of course it's nice of you, because you think the bleeding frightens me. But it doesn't—not when I'm the only person that can stop it."

By this she had his shoulder free of the shirt, and was gently trying the folded towel to see whether it would come away without renewing the hæmorrhage. She was not sorry to find it beginning to stick to the edges of the gash. From the tent she had brought a pair of nail-scissors, and with these she contrived to cut away the part of the towel which was acting as a plaster, without pulling it away from the wound.

"That was rather difficult," she said, with a sigh of relief, as she rose to her feet with the mutilated towel in her hands. When she had torn more than half of it into strips, she knelt again at his side.

"Now," she said, "as it hasn't begun bleeding again, I think I can make it pretty safe till you get to Santa Caterina and a doctor."

She then folded a large piece of the towel again and again, until it was a small, thick square. With great care she laid this upon the wound, and tenderly drew up the wet shirt till the shoulder was covered. She made him hold the pad in place by leaning against the cushion, while she passed round his waist a long, broad band she had torn from the towel. This she drew upward to the arm-pits, adjusting it behind to press upon the wad beneath the shirt. After buttoning his shirt to the throat, she tied the bandage almost painfully tight across the chest.

"I think that will keep the edges of the cut together. And it's best outside your shirt, in case it slips or feels too tight. I hope the knot doesn't hurt. I've nothing here to sew it with." Then suddenly, "I know," she cried, "how I'll keep it from slipping down." And she tied narrow strips of towel across

each shoulder, supporting the broad bandage back and front on each side of the neck.

She felt her handiwork to see that it was firm; then stood away from him and regarded it. And so much satisfaction did it give her that she forgot for a moment that this was a man she did not know.

"I think it's very good for an amateur," she said gaily. "Don't you, Mr Corsair?"

Bethune sat forward, moving his shoulders a little, feeling her work with the fingers of both hands, gingerly lifted.

"It's as right as rain," he answered. "And very comfortable. Why did you call me that?"

"Call you what?"

"Corsair—Mr Corsair," he repeated, smiling.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the girl, checking her little expansion, and speaking with a coldness none the less chilling for its lack of offence. "Oh, yes I do," she went on, with grave simplicity. "You said something about coming here from Corsica in a pirate ship, didn't you? One can't talk for ever without a peg to hang one's words to. I don't know yours, and in the excitement of finishing my surgery I forgot that I didn't know you well enough to invent a name for you. I ought to apologise."

"Please don't," said Bethune. "I like it better than my own."

He did not seem overpowered, as she had expected him to be, by her dignity. Yet he spoke so pleasantly, that she prepared herself to unbend a little.

For some moments she regarded him gravely, and he did not flinch from her gaze. This pleased her, since she still believed, being seventeen, in the power of the virtuous eye—which was, of course, her own—to render the other sort of eye incapable of sustaining its attack.

But Bethune, wholly unaware of the ordeal she supposed him undergoing, was saying to himself:

"She changes her age every minute. That snubbing came out as if it had thirty years behind it."

"I think I'll stand up," he said aloud. And he stretched out the hand of his wounded shoulder with a gesture at once so feeble and so full of appeal that Mary's heart swelled in immediate response, and she forgot the intended gradation of her return to kindness. With eyes eloquent of the protective impulse, she bent to help him. It was not only her face, but

every line of Mary's body that put him in instant mind of a young mother running to catch her child before it should come to grief in the chasm of the gutter.

But she would not take the hand he stretched towards her.

"Not that one," she cried. "Keep it close to your side, or I'll put it in a sling and fasten the elbow to your waist."

Bethune smiled gratefully on her eagerness, shifted his weight a little, and held out the left hand, upon which he had been leaning.

"May I use this one, Mademoiselle Samaritaine?" he asked.

And then, just as she was going to take the long, brown fingers in hers, she saw his eye, travelling from her face to her outstretched hand, fall at last upon his own. A flash of pallor left his face utterly bloodless. His hand fell.

"Good God!" he muttered. "All for nothing, after all!"

She saw him stare dully down at his bare fingers on the sand, and remembered the diamond.

"Is it a ring?" she asked, feeling in her pocket.

"Yes," he answered. "I swam ashore to save it, and I must have lost it on the way. It was a bit loose for my little finger."

"And too big for any of mine," interrupted the girl joyfully. "That's why it has been in my pocket."

And she flashed its brilliance in his face, as a child might have waved it in a triumph of recovery.

"It slipped from your hand into mine, when I pulled you out of the water."

Bethune was very grateful, and it rejoiced the girl to see the light come back to his face as he tried to thank her.

"You do everything for me," he said. "Even the Good Samaritan didn't manage to recover what the thieves had taken."

"Nobody stole this," she answered.

"They tried," said Bethune. "And if anybody else had found me—"

To make her understand his obligation, he told her, with a touch of feeling breaking here and there through the reserve of his words, why he prized the jewel, and how his reluctance to part with it had been the cause of the very voyage which had so nearly deprived him of it.

"And after all," he said in conclusion, "—after all the trouble I've taken, and all I've given you, Mademoiselle la

bonne Samaritaine, I shall have to pledge or sell it in Santa Caterina for food, bed and doctor."

This, if Lady Mary had been more worldly-wise, would at once have betrayed the beggar to her suspicions. But with so complete a sincerity were the words uttered, that she replied with simplicity as direct.

"I think you ought not to do that," she said; and stooping helped him to rise. When he stood, with a very passable imitation of firmness,

"You want to go to Santa Caterina?" she asked, in a tone so business-like that it sounded cold.

"Yes," said Bethune, with the world so whirling about him that he knew no want but to lie down again.

"After dark?"

Bethune grinned vaguely, and looked down at his bare shanks.

"It would be more seemly," he said.

The girl smiled politely, and he asked himself once more what the devil her age might be.

"Do you think," she asked, "that you could manage a ten minutes' walk? The walking will include, I'm afraid," she added, "some climbing."

And then, before he could reply,

"If you can," she explained, "it would be much better for you than waiting here till sunset. I could give you something to eat, though I'm afraid I have no clothes that will suit you. I am proposing," she went on, "to take you to my studio. It is a little way up the hill there. Of course I would rather take you to the house where I live; but that's too far for you to walk, before you've had some food."

Bethune was feeling stronger on his legs, while the universe settled slowly to its normal relations with his senses.

"I was never hungrier in my life," he said. "I think I can walk now, and I shall be very grateful if you will take me to your studio."

Lady Mary picked up the broken bottle and the remnants of the towel. She took the rough way over the rocks to her tent, helping his somewhat uncertain steps with a kind of cold tenderness which would have amused Bethune, had he been less occupied with the discomfort of his own sensations.

They reached the bathing-tent, and Mary went in to set down the remnants of towel and bottle. And then they began the ascent of the ridge. Here he got on better for a while, for

the path, though steep, was at first smooth enough. Lady Mary walked ahead of him, and he watched, with growing interest, her movement and the lines of her figure.

"Most beautiful backs," said the man to himself, "have ugly faces behind them. It's a comfort this is an exception."

Lady Mary came to a very rough bit of the path—a steep and irregular bend, with here and there sharp stones sticking up. She stopped and turned, holding her hand out to Bethune very graciously, with yet a loftiness in her manner which made him feel, as he stretched his left hand to meet her fingers, that he was accepting condescension at least imperial.

"The stones here will hurt your feet, I am afraid," was her explanation of the offered help.

The stones did hurt them; and the sight of his own exiguous and sodden clothing, obtained in the glance towards his bare feet in search of the smoother places wherein to set them, lent aid of superficial contrast to enhance the difference suggested by her demeanour.

Steadily and doggedly though Bethune advanced up the hill, he fancied that he was swaying, almost reeling, in his gait. He ground his teeth in a vain effort to control the curious, floating numbness of his long immersion and considerable loss of blood; and fixed his eyes on the pretty brown shoes and the perfectly cut fawn skirt which seemed to dance for ever before and above him. And so it was that, when they reached the bridge of the three pines, the poor, half-naked castaway was nearly spent. But here his *bonne et belle Samaritaine*, as he used afterwards to call Lady Mary, neither paused nor looked round. The horror of unfenced depth had never taken hold upon her. Nor would it now have fixed its grisly clutch upon poor Bethune, but for his bodily weakness. He was a man who had done many of the things which men call brave. But that crossing of Lady Mary's bridge was certainly not the least courageous of his life.

She pursued her way toward the chestnut grove without looking back, until she came to a second rugged turn in the path. All the way from the sea the naked footsteps behind her had fallen almost noiseless. Believing Bethune, therefore, still at her heels, she turned, as she had turned below, with the offer of an outstretched hand.

The man was nowhere in sight, and a wave of guilty horror rushed over her. Perhaps he had fainted again half-way across, and fallen into the road!

Breathless with running, she found him on the hither side of the bridge, seated upon a boulder.

He did not look up until, dignity forgotten in relief from terror, she laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Oh, what's the matter?" she panted, when she saw his face.

"I couldn't keep up with you," said Bethune; "that's all."

"I thought you were close behind me. I was afraid you had turned giddy on the bridge. I've had the most horrible fright."

"Then I'll confess there are two of us," he replied, smiling faintly. "But mine was my own fault."

"It was mine," said Mary, full of penitence. "I ought not to have left you."

"You couldn't know that a man would be such a fool as to funk that little bridge," objected Bethune. "I've heard of that sort of thing, but never felt it till now. I suppose it got hold of me because I'm not quite fit."

And he rose to his feet.

"I was a beast to leave you alone," said the girl; and slid her right arm inside his left elbow, closing the fingers upon his fore-arm. "I'm not going to lose hold of you again till we get there. It won't take us long, if you let me help."

And help him very successfully she did, until they came beneath the chestnut trees.

"I like her best," he had mused during this last stage of his difficult journey, "when she's youngest." Had his intelligence not been clouded by that extreme lassitude which weighed upon him every moment more heavily, he might perhaps have asked himself how many and how contradictory were to be his variations from this judgment.

The air was sweet, and fresher, up here, he thought; and she—who was it?—someone, anyhow, was bidding him sit down—upon something which he could not see. In the voice which spoke to him from so far off he seemed to detect a note of anxiety. And he felt a little push against the knot of the bandage which crossed his chest so uncomfortably. He had thought the thrust was of kindly intent; but when it became a certain thing that he was falling for ever through the limitless void, he could no longer doubt that a murderous purpose had cast him in his weakness from some high place into eternity. He could, indeed, no longer doubt anything. An angel was

now busy with lifting his feet; which was manifestly absurd, since there could be no lifting where there was no up nor down. Perhaps she—what gender were angels?—perhaps It would take him feet first to Heaven. And he wondered what St Peter would think of this mode of arrival—no wedding garment—no garment at all, till the sodden tweed knickerbockers came into view. He was sure it was an angel that had him by the feet; for he had heard most tender utterance of the words: "Oh, you poor dear!"

Lady Mary lifted his feet into the hammock, where, with a struggle for his safety, she had forced him to sit. She looked down upon him with lips which trembled a little, and eyes of compassion. It was pitiful to see a man so helpless! But she noticed after a while that his breathing grew regular, and that a tinge of colour was coming into his face. Satisfied that the swoon had passed into slumber, she turned from the hammock and went into the studio. She was accustomed here to make tea for herself in the afternoons. At the further end of the single room of the building was a cupboard where she kept her spirit-lamp and accidental store of provisions. But when she opened it, she was aghast at the slenderness of the stock. In her perplexity she went out again to take a look at the sleeper; and there was her big dog cantering up from the valley; and Menelik, catching sight of his mistress, gave a deep bay of welcome, and bounded to meet her.

Upon the solemn head of the Danish hound she was used to let flow in caresses some part of her great reserve of affection. He received them this afternoon in unusual volume and fervour, and seemed to understand that service was required of him in return for the fulness of the measure; for he stood watching his mistress with one ear cocked forward, and eyes expectant. There lay on the grass with her book a small drawing-block, with pencil, for a wonder, in its sheath at the side. With this in her lap she sat, cross-footed, and scribbled a note, which the dog, as he stood and politely watched her, knew that he was to carry.

But when she had detached the thick sheet from the block and was folding it, a growl from the animal made her lift her eyes and follow his with her gaze.

Bethune had raised his head and was looking at them. In a single movement she was on her feet and at his side.

"I did hope," she said, "that you would sleep longer than this."

"I believe I woke," said Bethune, apologetically, "because I'm so awfully hungry."

"That's what I knew you'd be," she cried. "And up here I have nearly nothing that you can eat. Menelik!" she called; and, the dog coming to her, she began to twist the narrow-folded letter into the brass buckle of his collar. "I don't think you're safe to be left yet," she explained; "and so I'm sending the dog down to the villa to tell them to send up a man with some food."

Now Bethune did not wish to be seen in his disreputable condition by a single unnecessary eye. This, at least, was the reason which he gave to himself for asking her point blank, what was the food which she had but did not esteem good enough for him.

She answered him like a schoolgirl saying a lesson by rote.

"There's milk—tea—half a box—a very small box—of sardines—four figs—one orange—three rolls of stale bread—some brandy, and—and—" she was counting the sweets left in the gaudy box—"three chocolate caramels."

"I don't know that a starving pirate could want better. If you haven't quite made up your mind to hand me over to a servant, I should be awfully glad to stay here for another hour, and then creep off to Santa Caterina. You see," said Bethune, "you've been so kind—and I've got used to your seeing me like this. But honestly I do shrink from being stared at."

"I can quite understand," replied Mary, gravely.

And so she made tea in the studio, to avoid the evening wind upon the flame of her lamp; while Bethune slowly gathered strength from the hammock, the stale bread, the brandy and water and the sardines. With each mouthful he was more glad that he had not waited for food until the tea was made. But the tea, when it came, he enjoyed most of all. For this part of his meal, together with the second half of the third roll, was shared by the merriest and kindest table-fellow he had ever enjoyed.

Even in girlhood Mary Frozier's spirit of humour would show itself seldom enough. But the spirit was always there; informing much of her work in after years; giving her daily perception of that sweet variety which is found, by those who have this spirit, even in life's bitter places. In its special manifestation, however, it did not make of her, true believer though she was, a direct apostle. Yet moments there were in

her pilgrimage, when the joy of existence, combining in a sudden and passionate amour with the absurdity of its conditions, would make her give spontaneously witty expression to the humour which was always the colour of the glass through which she looked out upon the world. She was of those whose laughter is enough for themselves, even though it never leave the gate of the lips to spread the joyous infection. But even these, a type commoner than their selfish practice will allow us readily to believe, have their hours of expansion; when, other causes than the humorous slacking the bonds of reticence, they are driven to share the joy of laughter lest they lose its cream—the cream which floats only to the surface of the milk of human kindness.

Lady Mary, as Randolph Bethune devoured the tail of her last sardine, felt happy. And there is no bird which flocks so persistently to its feather as happiness. It has so much, that more it must have and will. She had saved a man's life; it seemed a life worth saving; many odd and comical-tragical things had been happening, which their second half had forbidden her to enjoy at the right moment; so persistently is our comedy of to-day the tragedy of yesterday. Now, therefore, was the time for retrospective enjoyment.

So Benedetta, padding bare-foot round the western side of the spur, to spread out that bathing-dress for its third drying, was forced to admit to herself what till she died she meant never to acknowledge aloud in Porto Finaggio; that the *signorina nobile* was *Inglese* as *pazza* as any of those humbler English you might find in Santa Caterina. Of this those ringing peals of soprano laughter were evidence enough. Benedetta knew that in the hut where her mistress painted and drew she had never a companion but an occasional local model. And no other voice of laughing accompanied hers into the western valley. Bethune laughed, often and heartily, it is true, before he ended his meal with the three chocolate caramels; but his habit of laughing low, combined with his present weakness, killed his voice three terraces short of Benedetta's ears. And Benedetta's belief in the madness of that lonely laughter was confirmed by the rent towel and the shattered scent-bottle. She would have gone herself or sent others to the chestnut grove, but for her belief in a form of mental aberration which was national rather than personal, and which was thought by certain friends of hers, who had studied the disease both in Genoa and Spezzia, to have no tendency

to civil incapacity. So Benedetta left her mistress to her mirth.

The mirth, however, did not endure; and soon the more sedate conversation which had followed it began to languish. For Lady Mary was in a difficulty. Having done all else for her guest, she now wished to provide him with money; and she did not know how with least risk of offence she might offer it.

Of money in those days she was utterly careless and ignorant. There was an allowance that came to her somehow with monotonous regularity. But Blanche was rich, and to her sister increasingly generous with the passing of the years.

"But why should you pay for that, Blanche," Mary had said not long ago, in hearing of her brother-in-law. "Surely I ought to spend some of my allowance."

Blanche told her very kindly to spend it upon chocolates and models and paint-boxes. But Mary wondered why her sister's handsome white face flushed as she spoke.

Colonel Le Dane told her why.

"Your sister, my dear child," said he, "is playing an old game very popular with women. She's trying to put back the hands of the clock. Doesn't the Talmud tell us that Eve, whenever she got a few minutes' rest, used to bother Adam out of his wits with her: 'Let's pretend it's Eden'?"

"I don't know the Talmud," Mary had answered. "And I don't know what you mean."

"It tells so many good things that the others missed," said the old man, "that I don't think it can have left that out. I mean that Blanche is miserable every time she remembers how soon you will be of age, control your own money and learn to buy a pair of gloves without asking her advice. I suppose," he added, "that you know why the prospect makes her unhappy?"

"Oh, yes," cried Lady Mary, "—much better than you know the Talmud."

Knowing so much, she allowed Blanche to buy for her more than gloves, while that redundant allowance accumulated untidily in pockets, glove-boxes, handkerchief-sachets and work-baskets. And if she was robbed, it was done with so prudent a frugality that she never found it out.

Her difficulty with Bethune, therefore, was not lack of funds. Her own gratification in the saving of his life compelled her to think him a gentleman; and there were not want-

ing indications that this rank was no brevet of her conferring. How, then, was she to offer him a handful of those dirty pink and blue notes? The fence was an awkward one anyhow; but it was the take-off that distressed her. And so that silence fell; growing heavier and more daunting until in desperation she broke it with violence.

"Didn't you tell me you had no money, Mr—Mr—" she began; and stopped because she had not his name to end her sentence; for the moment feeling herself to blame in not remembering what she forgot he had not told her.

But Bethune did not help her. His left hand was busy in a half-dried pocket.

"If I did," he said, fumbling in the stickiness of his sodden breeches, and forgetting for the time how much he had told her between his second swoon and his first, "you must have thought me a pretty raw kind of mendicant."

He had found a few coins, and displayed them in his palm.

"There," he said, "is the measure of my distance from destitution. With the coppers, it almost touches nine *lire*; and I've seen many a closer call than that."

Guessing at the meaning of the slang phrase,

"It's close enough," said the girl. "But you're forgetting your beautiful ring, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid I shall have to forget it," Bethune answered. "But I wish you wouldn't worry about me. I shall be all right. It's nothing new to me to be in a tight place."

"I'm not worried about you," she replied. "But I am awfully worried, all the same."

"How?" asked the man.

"About how to tell you that I can't bear to think of your parting with the ring," she answered, her words coming in a rush. "I don't know exactly how much money I have, but I can give you about two hundred francs now, and a heap more to-morrow."

She nerved herself to look him in the face, and met the large, deep-set dark eyes of her guest. She wondered why they shone so bright, but had to turn her own away before she found out.

"I don't think I shall want the 'heaps more'," said Bethune. "But I shall be very grateful if you will lend me the two hundred."

She fetched the money from the studio; then sat again on

the grass, counting the dirty little notes and the few pieces of gold and silver.

"I didn't know I had so much up here," she said, when she had done and was rolling the paper together as neatly as it would go. "There's two hundred and fifty-seven francs and ninety-five *centimes*."

"The two hundred will be enough," said Bethune.

But Mary insisted on his taking every *soldo*.

By this time the sun was disappearing behind the round hill at the end of Porto Finaggio's natural sea-wall. Bethune rose to go, trying to thank her.

"I feel ever so much better," he said, when she expressed anxiety for his safety in the three-mile walk. "I shall get along very well, I've no doubt." Then, with a look downwards at what remained to him of clothing, "At the rate I shall travel," he added, "it will be dark long before I reach Santa Caterina."

By the path through the river-bed, she took him down to the road.

Menelik trotted sedately behind. Discipline was discipline. But discipline, outside religion, does not pretend to control opinion. And about men with clothes disordered and insufficient Menelik held opinions very definite indeed. The ragged stranger had indeed fondled his muzzle and ears in the manner of the best school. And one could not deny that this interloper had good hands—hands by no means those of beggar or workman. Of course this might be an exceptional case. But exceptional cases were just those which Menelik's wide experience had taught him most to distrust. So he wished they would hasten their adieux.

These, however, took more time than even a suspicious dog could have anticipated. And before they were finally made, Menelik had reason to expect that a mere vulgar, inimical parting would take their place. There was even a moment when he thought it wise to reveal the ominous gleam of his teeth, so near did his mistress come to growling at her protégé. With ears attent, he wondered whether it was indeed to come to the one game he did understand—understood far better than anything they had tried to teach him—the game that was business, not manner.

They had climbed from the river-bed to the western end of the viaduct, and Bethune had at last said good-night, feeling foolish after an attempt to lift the cap that was somewhere out

at sea. The girl looked after him anxiously, as he walked away from her with a gait too careful.

And then he stopped and turned, checked by sudden remembrance.

"What a fool I am," he cried, coming towards her. "I forgot all about this."

And he held towards her something which sent a thin, keen ray of light back to the western sky's lingering memory of the sun.

"What is it?" asked the girl, going to meet him.

Then she saw the ring. After a moment's hesitation, she drew herself erect in angry amazement.

"Why do you offer me that?" she asked.

"You must please keep it till I return you the money you have lent me," he answered.

"Really," said Lady Mary, "you astonish me."

"Surely," pleaded Bethune, "that was the arrangement."

"I don't arrange things," she replied; and this answer she thought must surely crush him.

"With great skill and kindness," he retorted gently, "you have arranged for me to go on living. Living is hungry work, and cold work, and sleepy work. So you arranged for those needs too—to save me, you said, from losing this. And now you won't take care of it for me."

"I'm not a pawnbroker," she cried. "You make me furious."

"I'm sorry," said Bethune, calmly. "There's no reason, you see, why you should be angry. I did not say you were a pawnbroker. I do not liken you to a pawnbroker. But if I did—? From my own experience I can tell you that it's an honest, useful, and often charitable trade. You'd hit us poor men at home harder by abolishing the great institution of the *spout*, than by pulling down the workhouses. But if you won't be my uncle," he went on, intently watching her face in the fading light, and hoping by even the base means of a stale jest to bring a smile to its lips, "you might at least be kind, and pretend you are a great bank, advancing a million or so on the title-deeds of my vast but encumbered estates. It makes all the difference, you know."

The strange figure of the man—all this confidence and dignity clothed in mere shirt, breeches, and bandages—were softening her asperity. If the bodily clothing was scanty, of

the mental there was even less; not a rag of pretence, no embroidery of affectation degraded the simplicity of his appeal. Little that he had said was argument in favour of pawnbroking. Of this Mary was glad, because Mary was angry, and knew she would have to be angrier still if he argued. One's own way would have to be abandoned altogether if any quarter were given to insidious reason. Woman is at least as capable of ratiocination as her fellow, and it is her eternal and successful resistance to the power of the syllogism which offers the world's highest tribute to logic.

For his age, Bethune was wise. Argument, indeed, he had begun to use, when he caught a sudden gleam of humour from her eyes—and saw the short cut to his object.

He waited.

"I won't take it," cried Mary, trying to cover her moment's weakness.

Bethune thrust his abler hand into the pocket which held the money she had given him. A low wall with flat stone coping fenced each side of the narrow bridge. When he had dragged it with difficulty from his pocket, it was upon one of these that he laid the bundle of notes, with the few gold and silver coins.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that we misunderstood each other. Good-bye."

He began once more to move eastward along the wheel-less road. And the girl could find neither discourtesy in what he did, nor awkwardness in the manner of doing it. No forgetful hand went this time to the hatless head. As even Lady Mary had seen enough of the world to know, the man is often at a disadvantage who must take his leave in the open air, when no hand is offered him to shake and he wears no hat to be lifted. But this man's inclination of the head struck her observant eye as faultless; and the very turning from her to continue his journey was accomplished without abruptness.

As the lonely, ill-clad figure moved slowly from her, Lady Mary felt small and ashamed. A little, chill sunset breeze from the sea struck her right cheek. That damp cotton shirt, with her clumsy bandage crossing it beneath the arms, made her shiver in her warm clothes.

"Come back," she called. "Do please come back."

He found her the schoolgirl once more, with hands locked behind her—five years younger, he thought, than when he turned away.

"I'm sorry," she said simply. "Why do you want me to take the diamond?"

"You don't know me—don't know anything about me. If anything happened to prevent my coming back with the money," he explained, "you'd think me what I'm not. If you never saw me again, you may think now that it wouldn't much matter. But it would. I should be sorry always, in this world or the next, to be so thought of. You would have a bad taste in your mouth till you died—the taste of ingratitude. That taste," he went on, seeing that she was listening, "is the very nastiest in the world's cookery-book."

The little, cold wind from the sea blew again, ruffling the slowly escaping edges of the Italian Government's paper promises, as they lay on the coping of the stone parapet—the fluttering body whose soul had made the beginning of strife between new friends.

Lady Mary shivered again.

"It's quite cold still, when the sun is down," she said, with an eye on the shirt that she had buttoned.

Nor did she take it as anything but natural that Bethune should interpret her words by the translation of her eye.

"Oh, I'm all right," he declared, with a cheerful laugh. "'Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,'" he quoted, "'That dost not bite so nigh, As benefits forgot.'"

And just then the breeze, with the leverage of a ragged *ten-lire* note, flung a silver coin tinkling to the stones of the river-bed. With swift fingers Mary pounced upon the bundle of contention.

She held it out to Bethune.

"Please give me the ring," she said.

This was submission absolute. Giving in was an exercise which she had hitherto never enjoyed, and she had a feeling that somebody ought to scold her. Yet there came with her submission a soft glow of content, which made her suspect that her act had slipped into the wrong pigeon-hole of her categories.

The exchange was made, and in addition she gave him her hand, with a sweet and gentle kindness that made her age at once a gracious twenty-five to the man who held her fingers for a sliding moment.

Simultaneously their backs were turned; and while one was too well bred, the other was too proud to look back.

Before she fell asleep that night, two questions vexed Mary Frozier.

Scottish Agnes lay these two days in the fiercest clutch of her asthmatic devil. After dinner Lady Mary paid old Agnes a visit. For, if she was dreary in her proverbial wisdom and useless in her position, Agnes was passionate in her one human affection. For an hour Lady Mary stayed with the old woman, delighting her with her beauty and kindness, while she puzzled her not a little with a gaiety as new as it was difficult from the girl's conversation to account for.

But Mary, as she lay in bed that night for quite twenty minutes sleepless, began her introspection by wondering why she had told Agnes nothing of her afternoon's adventure. Since, however, this was a question to which she either could not or did not wish to find an answer, she passed to the next, which was the older and more interesting puzzle.

Why had she so feebly surrendered—so meekly taken from him the ring?

If there was one thing she hated, she told herself, it was yielding to mere brutal, tiresome, dogged persistence.

But had not this pressure been of a somewhat higher kind? She comforted herself with the belief that it had been; repeating in a whisper to the bedclothes as many as she could recall of the words which the man had spoken after she had called him back.

"He certainly expressed it very well," she murmured, winding up the proceedings when sleep became imminent. "I suppose, when you can't find any answer—when the other person seems to be in the right—it's nothing but obstinacy to hold out."

For even so long ago as the early eighties there were women willing—even eager—to invoke the Goddess of Reason, when it was plain that her judgment must be in their favour.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND MEETING

IT was very early morning when Mary awoke. She was out of bed at once and ran bare-foot to the window, flinging wide the green *jalousies*; and stood there, stretching her arms and breathing deep draughts of delicious morning air.

Though the sun was well risen, and shone glorious over the sea out there in front of her, yet the little bay and its valley, even higher up its terraces than the Villa Parecchia, lay still in the grey twilight of dawn. Lady Mary told herself that she would wait at the window until, over the hill just above her chestnuts, their own special edition of the sunrise should come to the lemon-trees, the olives, and herself. But a little later she changed her mind. Softly opening the door between Blanche's empty bedroom and her own, she made her way to a window facing somewhat north of east.

From this window as she watched, she seemed to become conscious of a growing expectancy, about as well as within her. Trees, flowers, air and earth—they were all waiting; waiting, she told herself, for a thing older than the hills, as if it were something new.

And yet, in those few long minutes before the first terrible ray shot over the bare shoulder of the hill, Mary had never an inkling of what in truth it was that she awaited—awaited with expectancy so intense that even her perfect health did not save her from the discomfort of a galloping pulse. But when the intolerable golden fire crawled and then leapt to her glad heart and blinking eyes, she remembered when and in what company she had seen it last.

All her life she would spring from slumber to clear wakefulness. She had no stage of sleepy transition. The eyes would be barely open before the swift white feet touched the floor; and the powers of sense, intelligence and emotion became hers as she stood erect. In these days of recovered health, the faculty of enjoyment—the power to enjoy mere existence—generally dominated the rest. Memory alone was a lig-a-bed; and would nearly always lag ashamed to this gathering to matins of the lady's wits.

To-day, this memory of hers played the sluggard even until that first ray shot over the ridge; and then bustled up, like many another late comer, clamorous with business and reproach.

So Mary forgot the sun, and the valley she was to have watched him embrace. She dropped into the chair by her sister's window.

"Oh, I wonder!" she murmured. "I wonder if he's all right."

And there she sat in her night-gown—her bare feet slowly chilling on the red hexagonal tiles; the great pigtail, which, miser-like, hoarded such golden riches, caught and lifted comically across the high back of the chair; elbows digging pits in defenceless thighs; while eyes and face, only now snatched from sun-worship, were sunk in the hands which, having done so much, must now be reviled, inside the head which leaned upon them, for having done so little.

Pictures raced before the dazzled and curtained eyes—pictures of all that might, in her scheme of possibility, have happened to the man she had rescued, bandaged, fed and given money to.

How was she to know what had happened? When would he come and tell her? Who was he? What was he? What sort of doctor would he hit upon? Could his strength take him all those three miles into Santa Caterina? She ought to have gone with him. She ought to have brought him to the villa. She ought to have fetched Peters. There were, indeed, so many things which she ought to have done, that thinking of them began to interfere with that succession of vivid images—images of the things which ought, might, could, should, ought not and probably had happened to the Corsair, after she had turned her back upon his. How she had wanted to look round! And how small the comfort she had been able to squeeze from her successful effort not to look round!

She had meant to creep back into bed again—it was so absurdly early. But now she gave it up. It was impossible to rest, sleeping or waking, while she did not know him safe.

It was not, of course, that the man mattered. But mere humanity made it necessary to her peace of mind to know that he was alive and cared for.

What, then, was she to do? Sit at home or in her studio, in the hope of his coming? With the care of an Italian doctor added to his fatigue and injuries, the man was probably in bed.

Should she walk about the streets and alleys and squares of Santa Caterina until she encountered him? But, again, he was most likely in bed. She might, indeed, put on her prettiest frock and make Camolino row her in state to the small but relatively important town to which she had sent the man from Corsica; there arrived, it was easy for her to call upon the refined and consumptive English clergyman, whose spiritual ministrations in the *salle à manger* of the *Hôtel Belvedere* she was not allowed to share. But the Corsair—she had no other name to call him by—*il Corsale*, *il Corsaro*, *il Corseggiatore*—she liked the last word best—*il Corseggiatore* was certainly not the man to apply for help to the Reverend Mr Aloysius Lumsden. Or she might go to the Avvocato Santuccio Imperiale, whose office was a first floor in the Via Regina Margherita. He was a good, kind, decent sort of imitation gentleman, as well as British Vice-Consul. But, for all the wealth of her fancying power, she could get no picture at all when she tried to imagine *il Corseggiatore Corsicano*, with his two garments and his two hundred francs, applying for help and protection to this very Latin British Vice-Consul. For the Corsair had seemed to her a man who knew his way about because he had been born with the gift to tempt every man and woman he met to help him find it. He would surely, then, find some better way than through any of these channels. He would make a friend in the street—a friend ready, perhaps, after five minutes' acquaintance, to die for him.

And then she wondered why she had imagined that last thing. Was he indeed a compeller of friendship? She was sure—oh! yes, very certain indeed—that he was; and was quite unable to find the ground of her assurance.

The green shutters of Blanche's eastern room were softly closed. The sun had no longer any secrets—nor the valley. The love-making out there was unabashed. The sun did most of it, but the valley enjoyed and understood it better.

If bed were no longer possible, food was the more necessary. And after food, for temporary consolation at least, the sea.

Lady Mary dressed in haste, and stole through the sleeping house till she found a larder and rifled it of milk and bread. The first she drank, and the second carried with her.

Surely the morning was young enough for the little brown boys' manner of bathing.

While she swam, while she munched her roll on the way home to breakfast, while she ate the breakfast that was Eng-

lish in its volume and variety though Latin in its daintiness, Lady Mary was happy. And with the last mouthful she reached conclusion of her perplexity.

To-day she would enjoy herself quietly at the studio. She would grapple with that "awful arm." And, if by dinner-time she had no news, she would confide the story to Camolino, and send him in to Santa Caterina to discover the fate of the man whom she had let go away wounded to fend for himself.

Her happiness prolonged itself in the form of content, until her struggle with the "awful arm" was renewed. Thence onwards both happiness and content dwindled to rapid extinction.

She came down early to her lunch—the healthy hunger of her young body and her early rising reinforced by boredom.

She ate well, reasoning with herself the while. It was only that she wanted to know—nothing else. Of course they had made him rest—kept him, no doubt, in bed.

Then who—what sort of *who*, that is—who was nursing him?

But even her lunch must have an end. And the rest of the day, till at night she slept, was sheer disappointment.

She had not, after all, sent her boatman to Santa Caterina to hunt for an Englishman who owned but two garments.

"A horrid day," she told herself, when she had said her prayers. "It's that awful arm—and not knowing," she added; for, with herself as confessor, she was honest above the average.

She slept late into the morning, and filled most of her time between breakfast and lunch with writing a long letter to Blanche. At the end she was to have told her adventure; but when the time for this confidence came, she decided to postpone the tale until she could give the sequel.

"Tell her not in penny numbers," she murmured. "Penny numbers aren't good for people who are worried about other people. And poor Blanche is all the more worried about poor Charlie because she has just begun to find out that she's rather a pig never to have worried about him before." So she ended her letter with a postscript announcing that a thrilling new story would "commence in our next issue."

After lunch she changed her frock, put on her most summery hat, spread over it her very prettiest parasol, and walked sedately to the harbour, descending to the quay by

the stairs which had led Dr Trethewy so surprisingly to the beauties of Porto Finaggio; whence she bade Camolino row her to the bathing place.

At the tent on the rocks Camolino discreetly left her. But Camolino knew very well she had not come there to swim. Nor that only from her fine clothes. She had sat placid and gracious in the stern of his boat all the way; and when his signorina was eager for the water, she was restless in the boat as a lad of fourteen.

It was well, perhaps, or ill, for Mary Frozier, that Camolino and Benedetta hated each other.

"*Diamine!*" he muttered, pausing in his short, easy pushing-stroke to look back for the last flash of her gown as she mounted the spur. "She is a woman to-day."

This was a mistake for which Camolino was hardly to blame. He was not, at least, the only man to make it that afternoon.

The other was waiting for her, seated with his back to the very tree she had leaned against two days ago, while she watched the pointed sails of the felucca which had brought him so far on the fatal way to her.

On the first sight, each wished the other away. For each thought the other a probable intruder upon the expected meeting.

Bethune saw the approaching parasol, and then, as she turned the last corner of the winding path, the whole figure of the woman he did not recognise for the girl he expected. The maturer delicacy of the dress, and some difference, perhaps, in the gait, deceived him.

"That's certainly not my pigtail girl," he said to himself. "Perhaps it's some sort of an aunt or cousin."

For there had been a moment, while he lay dizzy against that hot but shadowed rock on the shore, when he had seen the escape of the auburn rope from the ugly cap, and had watched unseen its re-incarceration.

He rose without alacrity to his feet, cursing inwardly the string of polite explanation which must be gone through, should this graceful woman, coming towards him with an air of possessing the ground she trod so delicately, be indeed allied with—even, perhaps, closely followed by his good Samaritan of two days ago.

Lady Mary caught sight of him as he rose, and did not hasten her steps.

But when she was within three yards of him, she laughed and held out her hand.

"You didn't know me at first," she said as he took it.

"I'm afraid I didn't," answered Bethune simply. "But it wasn't much wonder. You looked so different."

"Did I?" cried Mary, well aware of the difference, and pleased that it had not escaped him. "Do tell me how?"

Bethune hesitated before answering, and she laughed gently and quizzically as she let her eyes examine him from head to foot.

"Is it because the reason won't be flattering," she asked, "that you are afraid to tell me?"

Bethune shook his head.

"Something vague and intangible, is it?" said Lady Mary, the sparkle of mirth spreading from her eyes over her whole countenance. "Or was it only the same reason that kept me at first from knowing you?"

"It's not vague," he replied. "Nor is it clothes. There's nothing amusing, nor even odd, about yours, you see."

"Yours looked all right, till you lifted your hat and spoke English," said the girl, trying to excuse herself. "And then all of a sudden you were funny. I'm sorry I smiled."

"I'm not," said Bethune pleasantly. "I think the man that cut them was a wasted artist—caricaturist, you know. But, after all, you must admit that it's better to come in these than as I was compelled to appear at our first meeting."

"Oh, yes, of course," said the girl, flushing vividly; for the man's very simplicity and lack of discomfort in his bizarre costume made her feel that she had been lacking in courtesy; giving her a sudden glimpse of the shame she must have felt of herself, had the man shown any shame of his garments.

Bethune laughed; and his laughter carried consolation in its tone and modulation.

"Properly understood, you know," he said in explanation of his mirth, "it was very subtle flattery to smile like that at my jacket and trousers. You seemed to know that they didn't come from my own tailor."

Lady Mary's colour faded to the normal, and she smiled at him again, this time with gratitude.

"And I had to come, you know," he went on. "I couldn't put it off."

"Of course you couldn't," cried Mary vehemently.

Bethune looked at her sharply.

"Because I had to thank you—" he began.

But she interrupted him, looking him in the face with suddenly raised eyes of profound and transparent simplicity.

"I didn't mean that," she said. "I meant—because you must have known that I was getting awfully anxious."

"I'm sorry you were anxious," replied Bethune. "I ought to have told you I'm very hard to kill."

"Oh, I didn't worry very much, you know," said Mary. "I decided they had kept you in bed all yesterday."

"That's where my doctor thinks I am now," said Bethune, laughing.

"Why aren't you, then?" she asked thoughtlessly.

"You agreed with me," he answered, "when I said I was obliged to come. Though we differed, I believe," he added, "about the reason."

To this she could find no ready answer, and for a moment they stood looking at each other. The colour rose a little in her cheeks. She knew that it rose, but did not know why.

"You're still an invalid," she said, a thin, soft cloud of dignity creeping over her face. "It is very wrong of me to keep you here standing. Will you come to my studio, and sit down?"

Bethune felt that her "will you" was less cordial than "won't you" would have been. The "my" before the "studio," moreover, was defensively possessive.

"I'm not ill," he said. "But I should like to come."

Lady Mary turned and led the way. Amused and interested, Bethune followed her; and not a word was said until they reached the further end of the chestnut grove. With a kind of lofty solicitude she offered him the choice between the long cane chair and the hammock.

Bethune chose the chair. The hammock, he said, reminded him of his ridiculous behaviour two days ago.

With an inarticulate excuse, Mary slipped away from him. He thought she was gone into the studio, but did not turn his head to see. He was, indeed, less strong than he had declared himself; and was not sorry, finding himself alone, to drop into the seat he had chosen. As the comfort of its rest crept over him, he wondered vaguely whether frost or sunshine would be on her face when she returned. But why, he then asked himself, should he care whether the girl—no, he meant the woman—should smile upon him or frown?

"It's so much easier," he answered himself persuasively, "to be grateful when people are friendly."

Very soon she came back to him, carrying a silk-covered pillow from the couch she had so often used for her bed, when the weather was too hot down in the valley. But Bethune thought her minute had been five.

"Oh," he cried, when he saw her face, "it's all right, then."

"What is?" asked the girl, beaming protective.

"I was afraid something had vexed you," said Bethune.

"I only went to get you a cushion," said Mary. "Don't get up. Lean forward, and let me put it where it will be comfortable."

And he endured the pillow for the sake of the adjusting hands.

"Now," she said, as she sank, half sitting, half lying, into the hammock, "—now you must tell me everything that's happened since you said good-bye on Tuesday."

So he told her of the kindness of a wayfarer forlorn as himself; how this man had turned back to give him introduction to the landlord of the *Trattoria d'Espagna*, a tiny inn down by the harbour of Santa Caterina; how the *padrone's* wife had been good to him, given him *Fernet Branca*, tucked him up in bed and sent for her own pet doctor to dress the wound in his shoulder. And Mary flushed with pleasure when she heard how this doctor had praised the skill of her temporary bandages; and paled with a sick shudder of sympathy when Bethune told her how he had submitted to the five stitches which now held the edges of the gash together, rather than give his promise to stay at least four days in bed; and soon she was laughing over his account of how he had sent the good landlady out to buy him clothes.

"These are what she got me," he said. "I told her to buy the cheapest she could, you know, and from that side she's a good buyer."

Mary looked suddenly distressed, as she interrupted him.

"It's my fault," she said, with a foolish sense of imminent tears. "I hope you do believe that it was all the money there was—that I couldn't have given you less than I had."

His voice and countenance had been full of the fun stored from his recent adventures. But now the mouth was set in firmer lines, so that there rose in the girl's mind a kind of subconscious fear of what would happen should its curves

disappear altogether. That, however, was before she saw the eyes. The eyes made her feel so safe that she did not need nor dare to look at them long. Eyes, she remarked to herself, eight hours later, were difficult things. When most worth regarding, they could not be properly looked *at*, without being looked *into*. And certainly Bethune's eyes, so dark and deep-set that their beauty would commonly escape notice until they were encountered in a moment of feeling, were now bent upon his companion with an intensity and an internal radiance difficult to sustain.

"No man—no human being," he said quietly, "need look at you twice to learn that. But you miss the point. I didn't mean to wear the blue linen trousers, the lumpy shoes, the white socks, the velveteen jacket with the absurd braid and inane pockets—this awful shirt and silly collar, rendered complete in its absurdity by the ridiculous neck-tie—I didn't intend wearing these to come and see you. They were to be a mere covering to enable me to shop for myself. So this morning I gave Mother Guerinadi the slip, and made a tour of all the tailors and slop shops in Santa Caterina. With a very cheap and crooked cigar in my mouth, nobody knew I wasn't native."

"That's what I meant," cried Mary. "If you talked Italian, and—and wore a moustache, you—you wouldn't excite any comment at all."

"I didn't—not in the streets of Santa Caterina—even without the moustache. But in the shops—well, the local fashions excited mine. They exhausted my Italian commentary, catholic though it is. I nearly fell back on English. You think, *madamigella*, that I look pretty queer as I am now. That's because you haven't seen me in the smart reach-me-downs that I wouldn't purchase. One good man had tears in his eyes because I would not buy the suit he was sure that Providence, operating through its Milanese wholesale agents, had intended for me. You laughed at me in these—"

"Oh, do forgive me for that and forget it," said Mary, eager, uneasy and determined not to be cross.

"One can't forget your laughter," he answered; "and it can only be forgiven for coming to an end."

"What odd ways you have of putting things," said Mary.

"You'd have had a right to say that," replied Bethune, "if I had made my call in that suit. Checks, you know—the trousers belled like a coster's *pearlies*. '*Precisamente Inglese*,' he said. And the poor chap made it clear very soon that his

prezzi fissi were only for his new strip of plate-glass window. With his final tear he offered it to me—the whole rig—for what I'm sure wasn't more than half its Milanese cost to himself."

Mary looked at him, as if imagining his person arrayed in these exotic glories.

"What a pity you didn't!" she cried.

"They'd certainly have made you laugh outright—not merely smile at me," he answered. "Perhaps I ought to have thought of that. But indeed even his bottom price was too much for my funds."

Bethune was of those who feel no discomfort in speaking of money. But Lady Mary, whose pocket was burning with a sum much larger than she had already lent him, felt very uncomfortable indeed. This second offer was harder to make than the first.

For a moment there was silence between them. Then they spoke together.

"The suit of reach-me-downs was strange enough, but I haven't told you the oddest thing that happened to me this morning," he began.

But she simultaneously:

"I'm forgetting all about the tea. The kettle will be boiling over or the spirit burnt out."

And she left him so swiftly that his effort to rise before she disappeared was a quite comfortable failure.

His head leaning, with the sense almost of a caress, upon the pillow which she had artfully arranged to crick his neck, Bethune mused, imagined and pondered till he came near sleeping. His thoughts, his feelings, and the swimming restfulness of the chestnut shade kept him utterly content until she returned, carrying a small table.

She would not let him rise to help her.

"Please be an invalid—at least for to-day," she said very sweetly.

With a very good will he yielded.

"Was it boiled over or burnt out?" he asked.

"Which do you think?" asked Mary, looking up from the embroidered tea-cloth she was spreading.

"Neither," said Bethune.

"How do you know?"

"You weren't away long enough the first time to fill the kettle and light the lamp," he replied. "And this last time you might have boiled a plum-pudding."

While she was making and fetching the tea, flitting to and fro, she seemed a girl once more in the energy and suddenness of her movement. But when she had set his cup beside him on the olive-wood stool within easy reach of his unslung arm, and had seated herself at the table, her courtesy in resuming the conversation was so grave and polished that he felt himself addressed by a young matron whose knowledge of the world had been gained through experience exclusively pleasant.

"When I was so foolish as to fancy my cold and empty kettle was bubbling over," she said, "you were just going to tell me the strange thing that happened to you this morning—the thing, you know, that was even more startling than those wonderful clothes that you would not have bought if you could. Please tell me about it."

Bethune began to think he was never again to get sight of the plain, eager, active maiden in the ugly cap and awkward bathing-dress, who had tried to trick him into thinking her a boy. But he was not to wait long for a fresh outburst of that frank egoism and spontaneous generosity which is among the sweetest compounds of human chemistry.

"I was only going to tell you," he began, "how my landlady served up with my déjeuner a very stale copy of *The Times*, the possession of which she evidently felt gave a *cachet* to her establishment. To please her I made a show of looking over it, and fell upon a paragraph which I read with all the interest she could wish. It was about the will of an old fellow that I never saw. He'd left all his money to a son, who was at Brazenose with me. They had quarrelled, and I had lent the boy money. I had some in those days. So I just telegraphed to him before I started on my walk here; told him where I was, stuck for money."

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Mary, speaking with the expostulatory fervour of a schoolboy, so that Bethune was at once reminded of the oil-skin cap and the escaping pigtail. And she pulled a large envelope stuffed with bank-paper roughly from her pocket. "And I'd brought all this for you."

She held it out to him.

"It's really quite a lot this time," she said, in a softer tone, half pleading, half apologetic. "Do please take it."

"How very good you are!" said Bethune, looking, not at the hand, but in her face. "No—I won't take it—not now. I want to see first whether my old friend is as honest as my new one is generous."

"You might take it," said Mary, "till the other money comes."

"You ought not to trust people so readily," said Bethune. "Isn't there an old superstition which tells you to look out for injury from the man you save from drowning? I might go off with it."

"It wouldn't do me much harm if you did."

"That sort of thing always does harm—harm that's much worse than losing money."

"Perhaps your friend won't send you enough."

"He owes me a hundred pounds," replied Bethune, "and most likely he'll send me double."

Then Mary, on the point of replying, caught the grave inquiry of the dark eyes fixed upon her, and forgot not only the words that had been near her tongue, but even her desire to speak.

"I remember," he said, "while I was swimming, and before I began to forget things—I remember wondering what sort of friend I should encounter this time. I knew there'd be somebody standing on the edge of the sea to pull me out."

"Do you always," asked the girl, speaking with a hesitation and a difficulty which she made no attempt even to herself to account for, "—do you always find one?"

"Nearly always," he answered. "I think you know that I'm grateful to you for saving my life," he went on. "But there's something I'm more grateful for—I mean, the way you gave it back to me."

"Aren't you making too much of it?" asked Mary.

"No," said Bethune. "Even in the nursery they teach us to be grateful to God for giving us life. But we don't see—at least, none of us remembers—the bounty of his smile and the fulness of his hand as he draws us ashore out of nothing. Most of us, I suppose, never see them at all. And so it's not surprising that a good many people have wondered whether there is really anything to be grateful for."

"That sounds rather dreadful," said Mary.

"It is," agreed Bethune. "And it's true."

"That there's nothing to be grateful for?"

"No. I said that many people don't know what it is."

"Are you one of them?" asked the girl, with a touch of fear in her eyes and voice.

Bethune smiled as he glanced at her before answering.

"No," he said. "I am not one of them."

"Then why are we talking about them?" asked Mary.

"If I ought to be grateful for what was given when I didn't know there was any gift, any giver, nor any *me* to be given to," said Bethune, "what ought I to feel to the person who gives me back what I didn't want to lose, and makes it seem doubly worth keeping by her way of doing it?"

"Oh, I see your argument," she exclaimed, glad to get away from the breath of unorthodoxy which she thought she had detected in his allusions to what she would have called "sacred subjects." "Are you very fond of arguing, Mr—Signor Corseggiatore?"

"It depends upon the other arguer, Madamigella Samaritana," he answered; then added, with sudden change of subject: "If names were any real good, you know—had any sense in them, I mean—one ought to be able to guess them from looking at their owners."

"You'd have to know the people first—a little, at least, even if names had that kind of sensibleness," said Mary.

"One never gets the chance," said Bethune.

"We have it—at least," said the girl, "we've begun to have it."

"Guess mine, then," said Bethune; hoping, without at all knowing why, that she would not ask him to tell it.

"Oh, you are Signor Corsale in my head," she replied, laughing. "Or should I say Corsaro—or Corseggiatore? I don't know which is best. I found them all three in my silly little dictionary."

Bethune felt something throb painfully within him. Yet he spoke again even while the pang of it was melting into a warm glow which alarmed him more than the shock. But neither in his voice nor his face was there any sign to tell the girl how much more she had said than she knew.

But he did not answer her question.

"I have no little dictionary to fit you with a name."

"But you have given me one already," said Mary, with a soft laugh. "It's much too good for me. I suppose that is why I like it so much."

"I'm content with mine," said Bethune.

"Yours?" said the girl; not trying to trick him of his legal appellations, but eager to find out whether he had in his mind the same fantastic thought which was enjoying its frolic in her own.

"The name you gave me," he explained. "It's flattery is certainly somewhat Byronic—but I like it."

"Why?" asked Mary, with round-eyed simplicity.

"I won't tell you why—not now," said Bethune.

"When will you tell me?"

"That's the same question," he replied, shaking his head.

Though she did not understand it, Mary accepted his refusal without further inquisition.

"It's rather a funny idea, isn't it?" she said, "to have a friend you have christened and been christened by. It's a good one, too. Didn't you say just now that if names had any real meaning, they ought to be in a sort of way *readable* on people's faces?"

Bethune nodded, watching hers.

"Then it must follow," she continued, smiling, "that each person ought to be called by a different name by each other person."

"Why?" asked Bethune, to keep the face interested and the lips moving.

"Because, to each person, each person is a different person. I mean—"

"I know. And you're right," agreed Bethune. "You mean that everybody is as many bodies as there are other bodies, don't you?"

"You are laughing at me," said Lady Mary.

"Only to agree with you," he answered. "Let us start the system. But when the reform is thoroughly established, you'll have to allow each of us some sort of label for business purposes."

"Oh, of course," said the reformer. "What's yours?"

Bethune laughed.

"I'll tell you that, Lady Samaritan," he said, "when I tell you the other thing."

"What thing?"

"When I tell you why it is that I have fallen in love with my new name, and don't mean to give it a rival on your tongue till I must. And that time," he added, "is sure to come too soon."

A few minutes later he took his leave; finding his justification in the faint wave of disappointment which he saw pass over her countenance.

CHAPTER VII

THE CORSAIR

NEXT day Lady Mary busied herself somewhat feverishly with her painting, making vain belief that she was glad he would not come. For she was sure, often though she would pause in her work to listen for his step, that come he would not, until the money should come from his friend.

With intervals for meals and swimming, she stuck doggedly to her easel. But during the morning of the second day she found her interest and attention wandering from the canvas where the "beastly arm" continued of intractable obstinacy.

"It spoils the whole thing to me," she complained.

Suddenly she remembered an idea which had come to her last night, while she lay awake. It was the germ of a new composition. Quick to seize upon the chance of amusement, she changed her stretcher for a large drawing-block, and her brushes for a bit of charcoal.

Her rough sketch of the grouped figures in this fresh attempt to perform the impossible was already becoming coherent in suggestion, when Mary's eye was caught by the single line with which she had indicated the position of a profile, almost in the centre of the composition. It was a one-line portrait of the man she had not seen for two days. For a moment she studied it; then with closed eyes concentrated her memory upon Bethune's features.

From the time when she opened them again, until the rough outline of the impossible was ruined by the crowding of its blank spaces with profiles, sketches and caricatures of Randolph Bethune, she pursued her amusement.

With various mediums and increasing humour she drew them; and the likeness grew with the humour. From the lead-pencil Bethune, clad in ungartered knickerbockers and clinging wet shirt; through the red crayon caricature with its fez, its absurdly crooked scimitar and its printed legend: *Il Corsaro Corsicano*; in the picture entitled: *Il Damerino Milanese*, where he was shown in the checkered suit he had

described but never worn; down to the last and most finished of them all, which she had drawn in sepia, this humour grew franker and bolder; but never once throughout the series did it fail in its subtlest and highest quality. For in all was a spirit of respect to the caricatured; a spirit which seemed to say: "The laugh is with me who draw, not against him whom no pencil could make ignoble without losing what it sought to degrade."

The end of her space and a sharp attack of hunger coinciding, the girl surveyed her half-hour's work. Somewhere within her a flicker of truth said it was good—much better than striving against arms and elbows themselves incapable of strife.

She picked up her parasol and started for the villa and her lunch.

She had not, however, gone a dozen paces, when she turned sharply, and re-entered the studio. The small smile of satisfaction had left her face, which was disturbed with a vague discomfort.

She stripped the sheet of heavy paper from the block, tore it twice across, and flung it into the basket half full of torn failures.

And then to her lunch she carried a serene countenance and excellent appetite, and from it a volume of Longfellow up the hill again to her hammock. And there, three hours later, Bethune found her so nearly asleep that he was close before she had seen or heard his approach.

His face wore the happiest expression she had yet seen upon it. He would not let her rise.

"Lie still," he said, "while I tell you all about it."

As if he had known her from infancy, he sat cross-legged upon the grass; and Mary turned on her side in the hammock, looking down upon him with an intentness which he observed without understanding it. For she was thinking how much harder that face would be to draw with the smile on it.

Since yesterday morning he had been in Genoa, he said. As the quickest means of relieving his need, his newly affluent friend had telegraphed to the English banker and Consul in that city to befriend him; and to Bethune had come a simultaneous message, bidding him call without delay upon the British Consul; and he told her how his friend had empowered him in the one telegram and entreated him in the other to draw upon him without limit; how the Consul had been

hospitable as well as swiftly business-like; and how he had spent three hours in procuring garments fit for accepting the hospitality which was a burden to him.

Mary asked him what had made it burdensome.

What but his eagerness, he replied, to get back to Porto Finaggio and the chestnut grove?

"But there was no hurry," said Lady Mary.

"Oh, yes, but there was hurry—very much hurry," Bethune assured her, while his left hand was busy disengaging a large envelope from the pocket of his new tweed jacket. "The greatest hurry I've known for a long time."

And he handed her the envelope.

Mary was ashamed of the pleasure which she tried to keep from her face. She almost made up her mind to receive as an impertinence the money which her sympathy with Bethune divined through its envelope.

She raised herself upon an elbow, rocking with the sway of the hammock; her left foot slipped across her right and over the edge of the net, displaying a pretty shoe and four inches of fine stocking, clinging wax-like upward from a finer ankle.

"It's no good to me," she said, trying to look severe.

"Yes, it is," he answered. "You wanted it."

But she would not let her face relax.

"You don't understand," he continued, with art.

Mary was more generous even than she was young.

"I do understand," she declared with heat. "You mean—I'm not quite a fool—you mean that—that more than anything else in the world just now you want me to know that you are honest and honourable!"

"Thank you," said Bethune. "You are quite as clever as you are kind. And I think, you know, that it's almost dangerous to be so clever as that comes to."

She smiled at him, and took the envelope.

"I'll get your ring," she said; "please help me out." As she rose to her feet she kept his hand for the fraction of a second, looking at him.

"I knew without, all the same," she said, and went into the studio.

She returned walking slowly, her head bent over and her finger-nails picking at the hard-drawn knot joining the ends of a string which had been passed through his pledge. She stood in front of him, not raising her eyes till the knot had yielded. Then she drew the ring free and put it in his hand.

"I was so awfully afraid of losing it," she said, smiling in his face, "that I tied it round my neck with that bit of string."

And then she laughed at her precaution; and Bethune found both the laugh and the smile which preceded it as void of self-consciousness as her words of hesitation.

This day again she made tea for him. With the handling of the tea-pot the childishness fell away from her—or, rather, as it seemed to her guest, was merged in the sedater charm of her more womanly mood.

It was during this third drinking of tea together that their acquaintance, pleasant already with its touch of sentiment sprung naturally from the circumstances of their encounter, was sealed finally to graver issues.

This "talking about real things," as Lady Mary called the discussions of that and many another day upon that and other hill-sides, she thought of ever after as the beginning of her education.

Before the end they had ranged far over letters, art and religion, with occasional raids into the territories of politics, philosophy and modern science. And through the happy and disastrous chain of days never to be forgotten by teacher nor taught, no angelic eavesdropper could have found temptation to the earthy sin of derision. They saw and heard only a maid of clear, simple and narrow mind, eager in any case, and most eager from these new lips, to know a little more of the things which lie behind the fog-veil of a universe; and a man ever stilling his pang—the pang whose authority of conscience he consistently denied—with the plea to-night that it was a child who would be answered, to-morrow, that it was a woman with a right to know.

Nor could the celestial spies have asserted that he was, whether in criticism, suggestion, instruction or argument, anything but good for her mind and her soul. Yet, if Mrs Grundy have a heavenly parallel—and, if she have, one may fondly hope her employed on foreign service—this censorious angel could not during those days have hovered about the dead German artist's studio without anxiety.

For it was not many days before Bethune—Randolph Bethune, who had rashly believed himself for the last five years immune—acknowledged himself in love. In love too deeply and unselfishly, he assured himself, to let his love become vocal.

For he was man of the world as well as artist—which was strong qualification of his selfishness. And he thought his knowledge and love of his kind made him a secure companion for his good Samaritan.

"If I were eligible," he would tell himself in one of the hours away from her side, "—if I merely had money, it would be all right."

And then again:

"But it is all right," he would compel himself for awhile to believe. "If I give her a start—a start such as she isn't likely to get in her holy rut of convention; and if she never knows what I'd bite my tongue out rather than tell her, I shall soon be a faint memory; but the things I have put her on the track of will last."

All which, but for the frailty of the conditional clause, was true enough. And it is only fair to this Bohemian wanderer of seven and twenty to note that, however careless or self-deceptive he may have been in the matter of one if, it had never, at that stage of the affair, crossed his mind that his Donna Samaritana, being a woman, might have a conditional clause of her own.

Who shall plead for us, we say, if we plead not for ourselves?

In the reports of those supernal detectives, Randolph Bethune did, without knowing it, plead for himself; with an argument of which he made no use against his troublesome conscience, but was never tired of employing in the nightly review of each day's repeated happiness, to the glorification of the mistress of his three weeks' dream and his quarter century's remorse.

"It isn't only what she is," he would tell himself. "It's what she's going to be—if the fools only give her room. And I'm damned," he added one night aloud, to the terror of a neighbour whose dinner had been less disturbed from within, "—I'm doubly damned if I don't help her all I know to get it."

And the whole thing was the fault of a dead American, reputed poet.

For, on that third day of their drinking it together, when the tea was at its dregs, he lifted from the thin grass the thin volume of Longfellow.

Idly he opened it in the middle, read a single word at the head of the page, closed the book gently, and as gently laid it once more on the thin grass.

Across the tea-cups on the wicker table Mary had watched

him. And her spirit rose with indignation ready to protect the thin poet.

"I love Longfellow," she began, politely bristling.

"That," said Bethune, smiling at her, "is very lucky for Longfellow."

Of the personality she took no notice.

"What have you against him?" she asked. "Please tell me."

"I have nothing to say against him—nothing more than against rice-pudding," said Bethune.

"I'm very fond of rice-pudding," said the girl, half smiling; then added with sudden gravity: "I think that was rather rude."

In spite of a sense of guilt which the reproof in her face and voice both produced and tempted him to acknowledge, Bethune assured her with much courtesy that he had not been rude. He had merely endeavoured, he explained, to avoid giving her opinions which would annoy rather than convince, by stating that the choice of poets, as of puddings, was a matter of taste.

"You said rice-pudding," objected Mary.

"Which you like," he replied. "I was fortunate."

"Oh, well—" began Mary; and then shifted her ground.

"You sounded so disgustingly superior," she said; "as if you were just bound to know best."

"I didn't mean it to sound like that," said the man.

"But the truth is too obvious to be concealed—is that what you mean?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Bethune, with perfect simplicity.

She looked up at him in astonishment; and then dropped her eyes before his with a conviction that it was superiority, and not his claim to it, which she had come near to resenting.

"Then please be nice, and tell me why I ought not to enjoy him," she said.

"I think you ought to enjoy it," he said, "—as long as you can."

"I want you to tell me what it is that you don't like in him," she persisted; then, with an air of judicial wisdom which, even while it amused him, Bethune found strangely imposing, "I want to hear your criticism," she added.

"Why should I throw a spotted shadow over what gives you pleasure?" he asked. "Besides," he went on, "it's lifting the stick of criticism by the wrong end. But, if you'll tell me

what you love in Longfellow, and, as far as you can, why you love it, I'll promise to do the dirty work afterwards, and give you the other side. Is it a bargain?"

Mary signified that a bargain it was. But it was not with the dirty work, as he had called it, that Bethune first found his tongue occupied. For poor Lady Mary, after an awkward start, was surprised to find how few were the words at her command for the description of the beauties she knew and felt in her client's work; and how many fewer to express the unformulated reasons of her admiration. It was not very long, then, before counsel for the prosecution, in sheer chivalry, had taken up the case for the defence.

Now Bethune, who never printed a line of verse, whatever he may secretly have scribbled, was on ground of his own as lover and critic of poetry, modern and classic. He had a memory unusually tenacious of the rhythmic and the metrical. He could, moreover, to suit his audience, so translate all technical terms into the vernacular as entirely to prevent the shuddering horror which marches, a ghostly vanguard, in front of the pedant. If the gods and his own passions had not found him better work, he would have been a classical annotator with emendation for his hobby. For the parallel passage sprang always to his mind as clear and precise as the lines of the great old marbles to the eye of the sculptor who dreams, sees, or fashions a new scheme of noble limbs.

When, therefore, he began to tell the girl who had pulled him from the sea all the best that could be said for her small idol, she beheld the suave and slender deity glorified with a radiance unsuspected, and his Olympian claims, as it seemed to her, proved rather than merely pleaded. Passage after passage of the best and least popular had been quoted without reference to the thin volume at their feet. Nothing had been selected for blame; and with skilful forbearance the renegade advocate had cited not one parallel passage from other sources; for such passages came to him now like sea-birds battering a beacon. But, while the vague hands of his mind kept brushing aside their crowding wings, they would seize now and again upon the fatter and likelier, thrusting them into some mental cage, till they should be loosed again to prove the case he seemed to have abandoned.

"He was only teasing me," Mary thought, as Bethune ended with three of the best lines from Hiawatha's lullabic sweetness.

And then a small seed of doubt began to shoot in her mind. Yet she attacked boldly.

"It is good of you," she said, "to say for me all that I wanted to say—and a great deal more, indeed, than I knew could be said. I think you have made me love the poems more than I ever loved them before. And you have said some exquisite lines that even I didn't know. But—much more than that—you have told me why I admire and love what he says, and why he says it. You must have been only making fun of me when you pretended you didn't like it too."

Bethune said that he had not been laughing at her; but proposed to let the matter drop in this its most pleasing stage. But Mary insisted on hearing the other side.

"I shall bore you," he objected.

"When you do, I'll tell you. Please go on," said Mary.

When she had listened for fifteen minutes which seemed a bare five, she interrupted.

"What a wonderful memory you have!" she exclaimed. "And what a strange way of running a thing down! You've used all those beautiful passages over again, and then compared them with other people's better things of the same kind. Of course, not being quite an idiot, I can see the differences when you show them to me. But couldn't you have made out a stronger case for the prosecution, if you'd quoted worse lines—better specimens for your purpose, I mean?"

"I dare say. I know there are plenty I could pick holes in," Bethune replied. "But I'm not fond of the process, and it isn't often worth the trouble. And perhaps you see now that I didn't want to run down what you like—had no desire to prove it bad. I only wanted to show you it wasn't good enough."

"Oh, yes, I do understand. And you're right," she said warmly. "You were only trying to make me get Caesar and Rome into their proper places."

"That's it," said Bethune.

So the small sweet god was moved into a side niche of her temple, where the dust of the years should cover his smoothness.

Much as Bethune may have disliked the office of destructive critic, it was, nevertheless, no later than the next day, forced upon him.

He had come again, between the hours of three and four, as if it were a law of nature that he should have tea with her.

And Mary had received him as naturally as he had presented himself.

She was sure that by this time he must know that she drew and painted. Yet he had shown no sign of interest in the discovery; and she was driven to open the subject herself. She hoped that he, who seemed to know so many things, might understand, at least as critic, something of painting also. So she asked him would he come into the painting-room, and look at some of her work while the kettle was boiling.

She showed him several canvases—those which she considered her higher attempts rather than her best performance. One after another, as she placed them on the easel, he regarded them. No word came from his lips, and she dared not look at his face, for the fear that he might look in hers. And steadily with her hope sank her courage, till all that she could muster of resistance against the pain in her throat was a mask of dignity. And soon even the dignity was endangered—balanced upon the knife-edge dividing tears from defiance.

She was glad that he did not look at her till he had taken his fill of the terrible fourth "composition"—that of the "beastly arm." It was because he knew what he would find upon it that his eyes avoided her face.

"Is that all of them?" he asked.

The lump in her throat was horrible, and before she could reply, he had softened his words with explanation.

"I mean, haven't you something of a different kind—sketches—studies—scraps?" he said; and Mary, glad to act rather than speak, fetched and gave into his hands a portfolio of water-colour sketches.

He lifted a foot to the seat of the nearest chair, laying the collection upon his knee, open to his hand; and so, provided with something new to regard when he pleased, became at once able to speak of the old.

"You've been trying," he said in a low voice, smooth and severe, "to *make* pictures. There are pictures all round you—they only want finding. But you have shut your eyes hard and asked yourself, with all the earnest energy of the manufacturer: 'What shall I make them of?' And, having found a hackneyed tale out of some epic or story-book well enough known to help out the explanation of what you aren't strong enough to explain yourself, you have set to work with the zeal of the mere and imperfect craftsman to put on your canvas any but the best moment of the poor, tired episode. They'd be better if

you'd managed to seize upon the point which tells what went before as surely as what is coming after. I don't know why there should be a story—a story-book story, I mean. Of course a picture must mean something—and that's its own story—a story that it may tell you without your being able to tell it again in words any better than you could tell a *polonaise* of Chopin, or a *sonata* of Beethoven. Ah, that's better," he cried.

His eye had caught one of the water-colour sketches, which he had been turning over with hands whose nervousness was the only evidence that he knew what he was doing—knew anything at all of the pain he was giving.

"That's better," he repeated. "The colour isn't half bad—and it does tell something, anyhow."

For three minutes she had stood with her back to him; and he knew why.

"Those oils, now," he continued, while the girl squeezed in her pocket the handkerchief she was too proud to lift to her eyes, "weren't even good book illustrations—not dramatic—didn't even tell the other chap's tale well. They'd need 'see page fifty-nine', and a legend underneath. But this is different—it tells something and tells it well—would make a man want to see the place."

"Oh!" said the girl; it was a gasp which tried, with courageous hypocrisy, to cover a sob.

Bethune went on as if he had heard nothing.

"But that isn't enough—not nearly enough," he said. "It should make him feel, even if he'd seen the place, that he had learned something more about it. I could tell you why it ought to do that, if you weren't by this time horribly angry with me."

Mary shook her head.

"Well, it's good of you not to be," he said. "Now, your sketch shows to anyone who looks at it, a little less than each would get if he had stood behind you while you were at work on it—the common minimum, I mean, that is there to all. All men are alike, no two are identical. And no two men in all the world would see the same—not if all the men and women and children in the world could look in one hour through the same peep-hole. What you see has to do with who you are as much as with what you look at. That's what art—art in its wider sense, I mean—that's what art is for."

Mary had forgotten her tears. She turned her face to him, now frankly mopping their overflow with her handkerchief.

"What is it for?" she asked.

"When you've done a sketch—I don't care how you sketch in other ways—that shows 'em all—all that see something of what you only could see while you painted, then you will have done a little bit of what it is for," answered provisionally, looking full at her.

He liked her better than ever before, and wondered tears disfigure women. Some, indeed, he remembered, wept before him in undamaged prettiness. But he decided that these did not count.

"You mean that art is for making people understand things?" said the girl, with an interrogation of surprise.

"By making a sort of common stock of the best in each yes—that's something like it—if, indeed, anything is for thing. And that, you know," said Bethune with a smile. "hasn't been proved yet."

"Why not?"

"Because it's only those that want to prove the opposite that worry much about it, I suppose," said Bethune. "All that's only a beginning, you know."

"All what?"

"What we said about pictures, books, and the other things. There must be a lot more purpose than that, if there is any."

"Tell me the rest," said the girl.

"No," said Bethune. "You'll do it better for yourself."

Mary accepted his refusal meekly enough, and returned to her immediate trouble.

"So you think I'd better give it all up?" she asked.

"I didn't say so," he answered. "I wanted to tell you to pick out the best in everything, and to throw your weight behind that. If there's anything in it—in you and your painting—it'll soon come to nice gilt frames and the British Public. I hope it won't stop there. But you've got to learn your own way—drawing to begin with."

And he went back to the four canvases, and with mercy exposed their faults of drawing, colour, and composition.

"There, now," he exclaimed, when the turn of the recent of the four was come; "that arm looks as if it worried you for a week."

"It has," said Mary.

"That's a good sign," said Bethune, and asked for brush

and colours. Mary watched the naked arm grow human under his quick touch.

When he had done both painting and talking of the subject on the easel, he laid the palette and brushes on the table from which she had taken them, smudging, as he did so, his left hand with paint.

"I thought at first," said Mary, "that you were only a critic—a person, I mean, that knew about things without being able to do them."

She was smiling in triumph—the vicarious triumph over that hateful arm, which had grown in her mind to the dignity of a hostile personality. She was looking, not at Bethune, but at his vengeance. Bethune was looking, not at her, but about the room for something with which to wipe the paint from his fingers. At last he saw the waste-paper basket at his feet. He stooped and took from it the first crumpled fragment that came to his hand.

"But you have made me feel happy and ashamed—both at once," continued Mary, while Bethune rubbed at the smudge of paint on his hand.

"Why?" he asked, looking round.

"Because things are so easy in words," said the girl, "that I thought—"

"Are they?" murmured the man, smiling to find her falling into the very error from which she was obviously about to exonerate him.

"—that I thought you only thought you knew how easy it was. But now," she explained, "I know you know how hard it is, because you can do it right yourself. You haven't told me your name yet, but I am almost sure it is a name I shall know when I hear it; because it must be the name of somebody who is 'arrived'."

"Arrived at failure—that's all—and the knowledge of it," he answered. "I'm telling you what I know from not being able to do it myself. I've wasted years at it. It lost me to scholarship and the fossil bliss of a college fellowship. If it hadn't been for the paint-pot and the brushes—"

He broke off suddenly. He had turned the bit of paper in his fingers inside out for a fresh surface, and his eyes lighted upon a fragment of Mary's caricatures of himself.

"What's this?" he cried, his face alert with eagerness, as he carefully smoothed the thick, crumpled paper flat upon the table.

It was the sepia drawing of "The Corsair in Bond Street." Of this legend, however, there was no need to show it, in figure as in face, a likeness of himself. In spite of the short frock, and the bell-crowned silk hat of the early eighties with which she had given him the air of fashion, she had increased, without injuring the personal likeness, that alien demeanour of the desperado in which the humour of her idle half-hour had consisted. Seen in its right place at the end of the series, this last sketch seemed to say that here was a pirate indeed, whose nature was revealed only the more plainly by the trappings of civilization with which he had endeavoured to cloak it.

Before Mary knew what he had got hold of, Bethune had rescued the remaining three quarters of the sheet.

"I'd rather you didn't look at those," she said quietly, but with face very pink, when she saw what it was that he was piecing together on the table.

"Why not?" asked Bethune, without looking up. "Anyhow, it's too late—and it's nonsense."

"I was only afraid," said Mary, "that you might think it rude of me."

And, before he could reply, she told him with hasty simplicity how she had drawn an outline of his face without intending it, and had from that been led into perpetrating this succession of absurdities.

But Bethune was delighted, and praised the cleverness and humour of the drawings; and, while they drank their tea, told her, with much seriousness, that he was now quite ready to give her advice.

It was advice more easily given and accepted, said Mary when he had done, than followed.

"Following advice," objected Bethune, "is the only way I know of taking it."

"Taking—I said accepting—*taking* is being grateful for it and admitting that it's good. *Following* includes overcoming all the people who think it isn't good. Three years' hard work in Paris! ! !"

And a vision of Blanche's moral posture towards such a proposal left the girl speechless.

"It's worth a fight, you know," said Bethune. "Can you always get a likeness as well as that?"

"Nearly always," said Mary; "when the person isn't there, and if I shut my eyes very hard."

"Um!" grunted Bethune reflectively. Then, after a pause, "If you ever do get those three years in the *ateliers*," he said, "always keep up that habit of drawing portraits from memory. With the hard work you might lose the knack, without practice. It'll be invaluable if you ever take to portrait work. Many good painters are bad at portraiture because they can't *visualise*—please excuse the horrid word. Now I—and a great many other ordinary people—I can shut my eyes and see alive, against a black screen, any face I wish to see—with a very few exceptions."

Like all students and women, Mary was immediately interested in the exceptions.

"Oh, well," said Bethune with some reluctance, "I only meant that I can't get the people I care about. They come to the inside of my eyelids sometimes, of course, of their own accord. But I can't bring them there when I want 'em."

"How odd that is, now!" cried Mary. "The better I like anybody, the quicker and better I can get them into the darkness of my eyes, and from there to the paper."

She forgot how he had praised her caricatures of himself, and Bethune, while he hugged the memory, was at pains she should not be reminded.

She asked him of himself—of Brazenose—of the things he had begun to tell her when he had found the torn and crumpled drawings in the basket. And he gave her a sketch of his life, avoiding the *suggestio*, and regretting the *suppressio*; and wondered much at the pleasure, less common with him than with most, of talking about himself.

It was nearer seven o'clock than six when he left her.

Lady Mary spent some minutes in the studio, looking for the caricatures. But she did not find them.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GOLDEN DAYS

DOWN the hill to her dinner Mary walked, in a quiet glow of joy which demanded no explanation. This was not, indeed, the hour in which explanation is sought or found, and she certainly asked none of herself. But she knew well enough that the earth and the heavens were suffused and softly glowing with a liquid and pervading goldenness. This liquid gold was within as well as about her; and the golden light was axiomatic; it was there like all the other things that mattered; and it needs less schooling than Mary Frozier's to perceive the futility of arguing about the things that are fundamental.

While she dined with an appetite worthy of her dinner, she did, however, feel some need of a reason for the joy that filled her even to the handling of her knife and fork. And she found it in the memory that somebody who happened to be a man had shown her new things, and new truth in the things that were old.

She went early to bed with the childish intent of bringing to-morrow nearer. As her limbs felt the coolness of the sheets, she began to tell herself that to-night she would never go to sleep; and slept forthwith, carrying the thought of sleeplessness over into her dreams. But not even in the morning, though she found its influence undiminished, did she know the name of the spirit which was ruling her.

And so the golden days followed one another, seeming in retrospect like one.

What little caution there was in the secrecy of the friendship was on her side instinctive and unconscious, on Bethune's unspoken. Her letter to Blanche which was to have detailed the original adventure was never written. The news was bad of Colonel Le Dane; Blanche must not be worried. She felt indeed that she would be quite willing to tell Blanche all about it by word of mouth, though her sister would, no doubt, scold a little. But she did feel, and more strongly every time that these thoughts came into her mind, the utter impossibility of explaining these wonderful matters in writing. Even as upon

necessary occasion she had brought herself to speak with Blanche of religion, but could never, nor would, write of it, so and by such feeling was she prevented from writing of these events; events which involved the thing whose name lay holy behind a certain veil in her mind.

And as day after day was fused in that single day which lay close behind and seemed to hold all her life, she thought of Blanche and social convention less and less. Everything behind that Tuesday when Blanche had left her might have been a vague and foggy dream.

From the country people the Italian servants at the villa came to know that, sometimes at the studio of the dead *Tedesco*, sometimes on the mule-track along the lofty ridge leading directly inland to the Cornice Road, sometimes sketching on the eastern terraces of the promontory, looking over the roofs of San Fruttiferoso towards Genoa, the mad English damsel was attended by an Englishman doubtless as mad. For aught they knew, he was a cousin, brother or uncle. The generous madness of the few English they had known removed this pair from the region of sexual curiosity.

Peters the butler, with a disposition as benevolent as his morals were easy, had announced, moreover, that this was nothing but a down-at-heel English artist giving to my Lady Mary instruction in painting at a few francs a lesson. The poor devil, he added later, was a gentleman before he took to it, and of course the kind-hearted young lady would give him his tea now and again.

Benedetta, indeed, remembered the towel, the laughter and the broken bottle. And Benedetta worshipped Lady Mary as much as she hated the old Scotswoman whose duty it assuredly was to attend to these matters of suspicion.

Agnes, therefore, thanks to her asthma and closed windows, as well as to Benedetta's jealousy, did not hear, while she was at Porto Finaggio, any rumour of what was going on.

But even Agnes noted from afar the glow of the golden sky.

One day she spoke of it.

"Ye'll be progressin' wi' yer paintin', Ah'm thinkin', dearie," she said, with a cheerful wheeze.

Whereupon there flashed across the girl's face a smile whose glory was a new thing to Agnes. But Agnes was a woman as well as Scotch, and what the smile told her was no new thing at all.

"Oh, yes," said Mary, "I should think I have been getting on, Aggie dear—like a house on fire."

Agnes feared direct inquiry, and disdained any other. Lady Blanche, she said to herself, in search of comfort, could not decently leave the lassie alone much longer.

"Ye'll no work yersel' ower hard, now," she wheezed, with anxiety justified rather by her vaguer thoughts than by Lady Mary's appearance.

"Don't worry about me," said Mary, laughing. "I've been tramping more than painting since Lady Blanche went."

"Then hoo d'ye ken ye're gettin' on?" asked the old woman, with a keenness sudden enough to have disconcerted conscious guilt. But Lady Mary, who was conscious only of happiness which she kept secret because she felt it sacred, laughed in her face.

"I know it," she replied, "by what little I have done. I'm not a house-painter, Aggie."

And still, in all these golden days, there had been no naming of the nameless force which was bringing her and the man so close together. Bethune's conduct to the girl would have given no handle to the most correct of haunting governesses.

Once they had tried a short cut homeward. The short cut had involved some unexpected climbing. Mary's foot had slipped, and Bethune, with an arm flung quickly round her waist, had saved her from an awkward fall. And for Mary in that flash of time, while he grasped and held her back from danger, time had vanished. *How* and *why* and *when* had ceased to exist. She let herself entirely alone and waited—waited, it may be honestly said, for she knew not what; but for a thing that must come as surely as it must be good. What did come, however, brought the tears to her eyes. For Bethune scolded her for carelessness with a sharpness which only her pride restrained her from calling ill-tempered. Ill-tempered it was—for one arm, he had found, was either too much or too little.

In making his peace, he pleaded his alarm, and was readily forgiven.

The late afternoon of the twenty-second day of their acquaintance found them resting on the hillside, far above the roofs of Porto Finaggio, with a magnificent panorama spread east and west for their view.

The girl lay beneath the pine trees, stretched upon the sweet fallen needles with the abandon of a savage, dignified by that assurance of right which, in the late descendant of a

ruling race among the civilized, will always establish itself as a pattern as difficult as it seems worthy of imitation, even where beauty and modesty are lacking. The effect, when these two qualities are notably present, is ineffable. Bethune, at least, with his back against a tree, a strange local tobacco-pipe between his teeth, and the sombre cloud of conventional rather than spiritual self-control grown heavy on his countenance, thought that it could not be expressed in spoken words, even if he should let loose his tongue. But he knew that he would sit up, perhaps till dawn, in his little room at the *Trattoria d'España*, trying to fix the verbal memory of the girl and her charm, evasive as it was compelling, in the leaves of his note-book. For he had this chance of success in letters—that he spent much of his time in trying for the best words to tell the things that cannot be told.

He was already searching for the phrases which would surely never come till a pen was in his hand, when she broke the silence.

"Why don't you speak?" she asked.

"Because I don't know how to say it," he answered.

Mary rose a little on her elbow, looking at him curiously.

"Say what?" she asked.

"How can I tell you," retorted Bethune, "a thing which I have already told you I don't know how to tell?"

"You can tell me where the difficulty lies."

Bethune was unable to keep significant eyes from her reclining body.

"Oh, yes," he said.

"I can't see," she answered, laughing, "why I'm a difficulty. I have them, but I didn't think I could be one."

"You are a difficulty, you cause difficulties, and I shouldn't wonder," said Bethune, looking at her with a keenness of inquiry that was not for things of the present, "if difficulty should turn out to be your proper diet."

"Which amounts," said the girl, "to calling me a cannibal. How can you know whether I make them or not? I never have for you."

"You pulled me out of the water," Bethune answered, "when I was in a fair way to escape the first and to accomplish the last of the difficulties."

"How do you know it would have been the last? And I don't think that is at all a nice way of talking," Mary replied. "And it isn't even honest, because it isn't what you meant

when you began. But I can see," she went on, "that you don't mean to tell me what you did mean. So I will tell you something I think about you—something much kinder than your thoughts about me seem to be."

Then Mary sat up, and, with hands folded in her lap, looked the man in the face with an expression upon hers which told so much more than was in her own knowledge, that Bethune, when he had sustained her gaze for some seconds with quickening pulse, was forced to turn away his eyes from looking upon a revelation whose time was not come—would probably, he told himself, come never at all.

Though through her eyes her heart had sent a message to his, her mind was occupied with nothing greater than the gratitude with whose name she had christened a greater emotion.

"You have made everything different for me," she was saying. "It is as if you had a key that opened doors—not doors that let one in, you know, but doors that let one out of things. I haven't had time to learn very much, of course; but I have found out since you came that everything must mean something. It feels as if I'd suddenly come alive or awake, and was looking at the whole earth and sky as a new thing—and all of it awfully, excitingly interesting. It began, I believe—the world being like that and me seeing it—when you came out of the sea."

Once already Bethune had made an effort to interrupt her. This time he failed again; but she saw the attempt, and waited. Then she went on:

"I used to be dull often—sometimes even bored. *Now* I can't think why I used to feel I was on a flat earth, sometimes, crawling about on it for no reason except that I couldn't keep still. *Then* I didn't even know that I felt like that. It's only since I've found out that the world is round, and hilly, and beautiful, and not a bit grey, that I've remembered what it was and what I was before. And so, of course—"

Suddenly the flow of words was checked.

"Of course what?" asked Bethune, still looking out to sea.

"Of course I want to thank you—thank you for what is so much bigger and more important than I can say in my stupid words."

"You ought not to thank me," said Bethune. "It's not my doing—not my fault that you—"

And there he stopped dead. For at that moment, drawn

irresistibly and against his will, his eyes had met hers. And he knew that the fault was his.

He was horribly shaken—morally, for fear he should yield to the strongest and sweetest influence which had ever affected him; and all the time passion was shaking him with the dread of its own defeat.

"Please finish," said Lady Mary, looking at him curiously. Bethune rose to his feet.

"I think it's late," he said thickly. "We ought to be moving."

"Oh, you are not my governess," said Mary, laughing; "though you have taught me more in a fortnight than all the rest in all the flat time behind."

Bethune knew that he was not her governess; and he remembered how Cain had declared to the ultimate judgment that he was not his brother's keeper. But love, he thought, is a harder devil to fight than hate; under-rating, perhaps, his less known enemy.

"It's for me, isn't it, to say when I want to go home?" asked the girl.

And the man, stupid with the longing to stay, to speak and to possess, could find nothing but a stupid lie to help him.

"This time," he said, "I'm afraid it's my call. I'm expecting a letter—a letter upon which my whole future depends, very likely. I think I ought to get back to Santa Caterina."

Mary rose, eyeing him with humorous suspicion

"Whatever comes," she said, "you'll be too late to post an answer to-night."

"I was thinking," he said, lying once more and with better art, "of the telegraph."

Mary's smile faded. Feeling the falsehood, she was by her ignorance incapable of probing to the honesty which prompted it.

"Telegrams are dreadful things," she remarked. "Things that have always a kind of yellow hypocrisy about them. They frighten you into fits, and there's never anything in them."

"If I have to send one in answer to that letter," replied Bethune, "it will certainly have something in it."

Particularly to this woman did he dislike lying. But, having begun, he had no scruple about making good his case

Without another word they began to descend the hill,

taking by silent agreement the path which would lead them to the studio.

They were near the chestnut grove when Lady Mary broke the silence.

"What did I say, Signor Corsaro?" she asked very sweetly.

"Say?" echoed Bethune.

"What did I say that vexed you?" she explained.

"Nothing—nothing at all," muttered Bethune.

"I'm positive I said something—did something—made some mistake," the girl persisted. "Are you one of the horrid people that hate being thanked?"

"I don't know anything that can hurt more," he answered evasively, "than thanks undeserved."

Mary laid a hand on his arm, forcing him to come to a stand.

"Tell me truly," she said: "was that really all that hurt you?"

The sun was not yet down, but they stood in the small twilight of a tiny valley. There was a hush over everything. The *cicale* on the slopes beneath them had almost ceased their multitudinous chatter; and the frogs would not renew their ancient chorus till the sun was well down. That subtle quality of the air which is found in southern lands by the sea, creeping as a stimulus to love into the veins of northern man and maid, quickened the beat of their hearts simultaneously, as they stood looking each into the eyes of the other. Along with the identity of feeling suddenly established between them there came a certainty, deeper than any words could at that moment have produced, that the emotion was shared. Each felt, and by spiritual insight knew the other to be feeling not merely the fulness of his own heart and the fulness of that other heart with which an intercourse so intimate had been so suddenly established; the best of it to each was that wonderful third quality which is the product of the two emotions, and different from each; the spirit of love which is the child of two meeting desires. For the love of great lovers is no mechanical mixture; but a chemical compound of the subtlest and most stable.

The time measurement of the soul is intensity; and by this chronology, their moment of spiritual contact had the length of a solid book of history, taken at the pace of most breathless romance. The eyes did not of themselves effect the union of which they were the channel. But without the eyes some other sense would have been needed. One sense was, however, sufficient; and while they met so, and so knew each other, not

even a hand was advanced; for no embrace could more closely have sealed the intimacy of contact.

And then there came a little wandering wind up the gully where they stood. A very little cooler than the air about them, it carried a mixed and faintest perfume of the sea, streaked, like the slow mixing of red wine and yellow poured slowly into water, with scents of seaweed, garden-flowers, orange-blossom, oleander, wood-violets and the nearer pines. It was to Mary's exalted and unrecording mind a history of the passage from the sea's edge to this height whither they had mounted together to find each other. The violet eyes filled slowly with soft tears; and the black eyes saw the sweet salt water welling up in answer to the call of the sea—the sea which had brought them by so swift and short a road to this supreme moment.

Along with all the rest, Randolph Bethune understood the nature of her tears. But he could not, for all his understanding, shut out their conventional appeal.

A woman weeping was a woman in danger.

The Hydra of Morality raised his seven heads, and the charm—their first moment of actual union—was broken.

But even Bethune's chivalry was here unequal to politeness; he turned slowly from the violet eyes, felt the jar of the breaking contact, and strode down the path.

In that moment of nervous as well as of deeper sympathy, Mary perceived that there was human suffering rather than personal affront in this abruptness of the man whom she meekly followed. Why a man should suffer, she could not tell. But, since her eyes and his had read this book together, she seemed to know that suffer he must. And that sublime and intimate meeting and commingling had left its everlasting mark upon her. Had she never from that soft evening seen again the man whose heart had met hers, it is yet more than probable that she would have carried always in her soul the print of the new-born god's tender feet.

She was, therefore, utterly at peace with herself and her lover; against whom she had nothing but her tender suspicion that he was not happy as she was happy.

And yet Mary did not, even in the uppermost layer of her mind, call him by that beautiful name. Often enough had she heard the word *lover*; and had held her private and jejune conception of its meaning. But this which had befallen her was a new thing altogether, she thought; until later she perceived, to the exaltation of the old world's experience rather

than to the degradation of her own, that this it was which, in many varying shades of life's redness, had kept the world going from the day of life's first unreasoning quiver.

And so, down the hill to the lower places where the shapes of things are determined, in the humility of strength she followed the man who was torn with the weakness of divided force.

Outside the door of the studio he held her hand in a brief and sudden clasp, with a muttered good-night; and she watched his retreating figure till it vanished.

"It's very funny," she murmured, beginning her own descent of the ridge on its other side. "Because everybody wants to be happy. And he might be as happy as I am. And nobody *could* be happier than that."

CHAPTER IX

THE WORLD CALLS

AT the *Trattoria d'Espagna* Bethune found that his lie had materialized. A letter awaited him—a letter crying for the speed of telegraphic answer.

His friend, who had so generously interpreted the obligation of an old debt, had not been satisfied with furnishing unlimited credit. Amongst the property inherited was an interest in a metropolitan daily newspaper. Such influence as this gave him, he had put in force at once in favour of his old college friend.

"MY DEAR BETHUNE," the letter ran,

"I was glad to get your screed, and to know you are all right again. As any other man but you would remember, I have the best of reasons for being glad I was of use to you. But I'm not writing now to keep up the rally of reciprocal gratitude. At that game you would find me too strong an opponent.

"The day before yesterday I met old Hector M'Cormick. He has bought a controlling interest in the derelict *Examiner*; and is bent on bringing the paper again to the front. In the lean years, you know, I used to work for him; and now that the fat kine have swallowed up my lean, he finds his belief in my judgment and discretion much increased.

"I found him, as an Englishman, worrying over the condition of affairs in South Africa; while, as editor and chief proprietor of the *Examiner*, he sees his opportunity there, and means to use it. He is convinced that trouble is coming with the Transvaal farmers. Wants to send a man out there now—a good man with a head for war and politics, as well as serviceable pen and pencil. Of course I at once drew him a picture of you that would make a tortoise blush. So he has been hunting up the record of Bethune of B.N.C., and reading your *Random Letters* in a file of the D.N.; and I've just got a note from him saying that you are evidently the man his people were hunting for in vain six weeks ago, and telling me to let you know at once that the billet is yours if you want it.

"As soon as you read this, therefore, telegraph to me 'yes' or 'no.' M'Cormick will give you plenty of elbow room, and good money. He's a thick and thin supporter of Bartle Frere, but wants you to go out with an open mind. If you do well, you'll stay till the row's over—or the danger of it. He's certain it will be the row. And we always thought him something of a prophet.

"Knowing you have no choice but to telegraph 'yes,' I won't write more.

"Come straight to me here and stay till you start.

"Yours ever,

"J. WHITEMAN HARDY."

Three weeks ago Bethune would have welcomed this as the best news which had ever come to him. It struck him now like a blow between the eyes.

But he knew Hardy was right. He had no choice.

There was something vaguely ominous, even to his superstitious mind, in this verification of his falsehood to the girl up there on the hill. To escape from her eyes, he had told her the first lie that came to his tongue. And here was fate insisting upon his living up to his idle words of self-defence. With mechanical meekness he submitted to the decree.

This meekness of submission, which was, perhaps, merely the stupor following on concussion, carried him at once to the post-office.

He had written the address of the telegram and the one word of acceptance before the flutter of rebellion arose in him. And then to his "yes" he added, in a hurried scrawl that seemed to fear hesitation: "but cannot leave till Thursday."

Now this was the evening of Tuesday—the third Tuesday since that which had brought him ashore.

He thrust the telegraph-form and a note for twenty *lire* into the hands of the dilatory post-master; and stood cursing under his breath while the price of the message was slowly figured out in weedy numerals on a scrap of yellow paper with a scraggy steel pen. When his change was at last given him, he dropped it uncounted into a pocket and made for the open air.

In his mind he pretended that he wished to escape the smell of personal and domestic garlic; in truth he wished his message, particularly its latter part, to become a fact accomplished.

But the post-master, who was also the telegraphist, had a conscience which, if less troublesome than Bethune's to its owner, was nearer the surface. He removed from his mouth a very unpleasing cigar, and asked with much courtesy for careful spelling-out of the English words.

And Bethune's conscience, when he escaped, though it *had failed to achieve the alteration of the message he had so care-*

fully explained, was irritated to a condition of painful activity.

With vows of merest and sternest friendliness in his final meeting with the girl who filled his thoughts, was setting his heart aflame, and could now make, when he came near her, his very body shake, Bethune lulled his tormentor into a quiescence of compromise lasting just long enough to let him go to sleep. But in his dreams there was no compromise at all.

The dreams, however, broke with the dawn; and the breaking drove him very early abroad.

With furious energy he walked for hours among the hills; returning to his inn at noon to find a telegram on the table with Guerinadi's *déjeuner*.

"Offer stands till Saturday noon—no later."

"That old tyrant M'Cormick's mad because I don't rush into his arms," he mused. "If he hadn't wanted me pretty badly, he'd have got another man at once. My market value's on the up-grade."

The hard exercise of the long tramp had been undertaken with a vague purpose of discipline, but the whole apparent gain was a keen appetite. He laughed now and then as he ate, flattering himself that his demand for two days' grace had been a clever business device to help him in determining his own value, monetary and otherwise, to his new employer. When he rose from the table, and sauntered out into the sun, he knew what he had at first refused to admit to himself: that the long walk and the good late breakfast had combined with the success of his telegram to his friend to lull his conscience rather than his passions.

His feet led him unresisting along the smooth, hot road toward Porto Finaggio.

When he had walked three quarters of a mile in a calm which broke now and again into smiles of content qualified only with expectation, a little cloud was blown across the high sun. The fleeting shadow, perhaps by some sudden appeal of hackneyed metaphor, changed the current of his thoughts. He sat down upon the low wall overhanging the shore and flung his cigar into the sea.

"What is it, after all," he asked himself, "that I'm making all this fuss about? God knows I don't intend the girl any harm. If I did, I couldn't do her any."

And then he closed his eyes and saw again, as clear as he

had seen them last evening, the opened eyes of the girl; and knew once more, with certainty past all argument, what thing it was that had reached its birth—there between them, where their spirits had met.

And then his conscience seemed to be split in two, the parts wrangling with each other, rather than with Randolph Bethune.

"If that vision be true," said the one, "—and you know well enough it is the truest thing you ever encountered—then it is nothing but the worst sort of cowardice not to go to the studio."

"If that be true," said the other, "—if the poor child feels what you feel—there is nothing you can do for her but to drop out now, and never see her again."

"Not to go," said the first part, "is cruelty."

"To go," said the second, "is worse."

And,

"Oh, damn my conscience," cried the man, "for an earth-worm and a jelly-fish! I've got to go and say good-bye."

Then he began to fill his pipe.

"Besides," he added, when it was alight, "I don't know what her name is. That settles it."

It was yet so early, however, that he went very slowly on his road, sitting often and relighting his pipe. And as he drew near to Porto Finaggio his spirits fell lower and lower. Something kept telling him that this was the end of what should, if love had its right, endure for ever. From many minor indications he had learned that her station was one from which it would be difficult, if not impossible to win her. Even success in his work sudden and brilliant beyond his most romantic expectation could only come while the best years of her life were going by. Before he had known he loved her he had cared only for his own interest and pleasure in her society. And now there was no thought nor care of his which could take one cubit from the length of her pain. To hold his tongue and let the breaking come quickly was the best he could do.

So he was determined that, whatever the tenderness of his adieux, no single word of love should be spoken. The speaking of it would be a crime, he told himself, whatever the temptation.

And after that he walked more happily to meet it. For he believed that, whatever his thoughts, Randolph Bethune was not a criminal.

But she met him in the way that makes men forget resolves.

Her frank and limpid eyes and her outstretched hands abolished time and place, holding even matter, as it were, in suspension. So that for a while he was only restrained from open speech of his love by the feeling that no word was needed to tell what all nature, themselves included, seemed busily interpreting.

Their hands fell apart, and without a word she led the way to the southernmost tree of the chestnut grove—the same beneath which she had sat, watching the sails of the boat that was bringing him from Corsica. Between two of its twisted roots, like the arms of a rough chair about her, Mary sank sitting, and looked up in his face with a smile coming slowly to perfection on her lips. And the man stood looking down and knowing nothing but the smile and the woman who made it.

"I've been quite happy," she said at last, speaking as if in answer to a question; "quite happy except once for a little while."

Bethune did not speak

"It was when it came somehow into my head," Mary went on, "that you weren't coming back. Never coming at all, I mean."

And she looked steadily at him, waiting the answer of whose happy nature she had no doubt. No answer coming, however

"It was a silly thing to fancy, I know," she continued. "But fancies are just the things one can't help, aren't they? It went away—when I made your face come inside my eyelids."

And still the man said nothing; for the universe was heaving spirally about him; and though his courage still clung doggedly in that dark upheaval to his conscious personality, there was for a time nothing else for him to know or cling to. The earth would settle down soon, and the sky would cover it—and then of course he would do something.

His face meanwhile remained unchanged in every feature but the eyes. But in love as in strife eye goes to eye, and Mary's were quick to detect the mist of the spirit's absence in the black eyes which they searched.

When, therefore, Bethune found himself once more in normal relations with the material, the question which Mary was asking seemed like a rope which had pulled him from the

depths. Yet she was but inquiring, with almost maternal tenderness, whether he were ill.

"Oh, no," he said.

"Then why did you look like that?" she asked.

Whereupon Bethune blurted out the truth with the simplicity of habit. Had she given him more time, he would have tried to soften the blow—perhaps would have told her nothing.

"I am going away," he said.

"The letter came?" said the girl, interrogatively, looking at him with frightened eyes.

"Yes," said Bethune. "And I sent the telegram. I said I would go."

"Go where?"

"To Africa."

The last of its ebbing colour left Mary's face. Even the lips were white.

"It's my work," Bethune began; but said no more. For he saw the girl was not listening to him.

"You mean," she said at last, "—you mean that it's to be—like dying?"

Bethune would have contradicted—was willing to do or say anything to lessen the horrible rigour of her words. But the truth of them struck him with such keenness that his eyes fell before hers, and he found no word to answer her with.

When he raised them, she was leaning against the tree with one arm thrown about the trunk and one side of her face pressed to the rough bark of it, as if in vain search of consolation. Her immobility began to alarm him, but when he drew nearer, she turned and stood erect before him. There were no tears in her eyes, nor was there anger in her face. But in both face and figure was something which stopped his approach.

"When do you go—from here, I mean?" she asked him, speaking with much gentleness.

"To-morrow—early to-morrow," he replied.

"Then I will say good-bye now," said Mary; and gave him her hand.

The dreadful finality of her gesture made him loth to take it; once taken, yet more unwilling to let it go. With her other hand, using a kind of cold tenderness which astonished him, she detached his fingers from her own.

"I shall not forget all you have taught me," she said, a small, one-sided smile twisting the lips to which the obstinate blood refused to come back.

"And I shall not forget," Bethune responded, feeling himself in the painful hold of a dream, "that you saved my life."

The small smile came again, and there was something in the strange curve of it that made him remember how he had questioned the value of the saving. And he knew that his life would lose most of its worth if things should go as this woman, who had looked seventeen seven minutes ago and now seemed thirty, was driving them. But the white mouth that smiled refused with its very smiling to renew controversy. But she did not refuse him her gratitude.

"You have done more than that for me," she said. "I told you—did I not?—that you have opened the doors."

"It's horrible—like this," said Bethune.

"Yes," answered Mary. "Good-bye."

She did not again give him her hand. Without a hope that she would check him or call after him when once his back was turned, Bethune devoured her face with his eyes.

"I can't go," they said.

"You must," said the girl's; and he saw in them a kind of serene agony from which he turned away in hopeless defeat.

He was half way to Santa Caterina before he knew a thunderstorm was imminent. Sea and sky were like ink, and the heat seemed doubled with the disappearance of the sun. Its darkening seemed in sympathy with that inner darkness which enwrapped him; until the first flash of a great Mediterranean storm split the sky above him, it might almost have been said that he did not know how, nor where, nor why he suffered.

But with that tremendous light there came a vision of his cruel and wicked selfishness, as he called it, which made the crash of the following thunder seem a far-off echo of his own pain.

He gained his inn, changed his clothes, gathered his few possessions for the journey, asked for his dinner at an earlier hour than usual, hurried out in a lull of the storm and drew money just before the little bank closed its doors; returned to the *Trattoria d'Espagna*, ate the dinner which Guerinadi's wife had cooked for him, went to his room, threw himself on the bed praying that he might know nothing till morning, and slept.

When he went to sleep, the man was stupid with the pain

which he had made for himself, only to see it shared and more than doubled for them both by the woman who should have received and given nothing but joy.

He woke, not ten, but two hours later. The pain was still in him, but the dulness was gone.

CHAPTER X

THE WORLD SHUT OUT

WHY she had acted as she had acted—whence had come to her the mature and unaffected dignity whose lack of all anger and bitterness had made his dismissal seem to Bethune like a hopelessly eternal condemnation, Lady Mary could not have told. Out of the past had fallen to her the old shield of injured womanhood, and instinctively she had used it to cover, not herself from wounds, but her wounds from the sight of him who had inflicted them.

With steady eyes she watched Bethune's retreating figure. When he was out of sight, nor had turned his head for a single backward glance, the girl sank once more at the foot of the chestnut tree. The gathering of the storm passed unnoticed; but the lightning roused her as it had aroused Bethune; and the rain drove her to the door of her studio in search of shelter. As she pushed it open, however, the interior struck her with one of those stringent pangs which familiar furniture, with its suggestion of human forms and needs, has so often the power of inflicting. There is no commonest deal chair so unlovely that a ghost will refuse to sit in it.

She closed the door, and went down through the rain to the villa.

Of what went on in her mind she could not herself afterwards have spoken with precision. She pretended to eat her dinner, and went to her bedroom; then the reaction came. For on reaching it she had flung open the green shutters. The rain fell no longer, but heavy clouds still overhung the earth. The air was warm, but seemed fresher than that of the house, and was laden with the scents of grateful earth and busy vegetation.

Till now there had been foremost in her mind an overpowering resentment—against whom it was no small part of her pain that she was unable to determine. Her natural woman's instinct would have turned its current upon the man. But something of newer and larger birth than herself told her that she was no longer a child to smite the door against whose

edge she had struck her forehead in the dark. The hidden forces that make things had been too strong for her—even as, she thought, they were most likely too strong for everybody. She had at least no reason for thinking that they had been more pitiful to the man she had sent from her than to herself. And then—whether from the weakness or the strength of her love—she found herself wishing that the blow to him might be of the same nature with that which had fallen upon herself. She loved him no doubt well enough to wish he might not suffer—if any wish, even transformed into intensest supplication, might avail. But she had seen his face, and knew that he had suffered—was suffering now. And if that pain were not all for hers, but some of it his own for her—why, then, be the distance Santa Caterina, London, or Africa, they were not so far apart.

After this thought, her mind wandered into mazes of conjecture concerning a spiritual proximity which should defy all limitations of time, flesh and space. And from the vain attempt to make him hers by sheer effort of will—from the supreme concentration of her consciousness upon the idea of the man who had changed the world and must be always the first figure in that greater country across whose threshold she believed him to have led her—she slid, defeated and unconscious of the descent, to the mournful trickery of mere memory—"getting his face," as she had called it, since he had given her the phrase, "inside her eyelids"; recalling and softly repeating words that he had said; fancying him at her side, asking questions which she could not understand and which she strove to answer in words she could not find.

And then at last the tears—and the utter abandonment to passionate longing and intolerable sorrow. Stretched on her bed, smothering the sounds of her grief in the pillows, she passed through exhaustion to sleep. In her dream he was with her again, till the horror of pulling his body once more, and this time too late, from the sea drove her to the refuge of wakefulness.

She lit a candle, and looked at her watch. It was half-past eleven only—and the whole unbearable night was before her. The pain and the fear of sleep sent her in soft-footed restlessness about the room.

Ascribing her pain, as men will, to immediate surroundings, she found that her chamber was intolerable. Silently she opened the door. The house was still as a church. Down the

stairs she glided, through the little *salon*, and by its window, which she knew could be opened and closed with less noise than any other issue of the house, she came out upon the terrace. Thence round a corner of the building she made her way to Menelik's kennel, knowing that hers was the only foot-step which would not send the great dog's voice baying through the valley.

"We're going to bed at the studio, Menelik," she whispered, as she unbuckled his collar. "I suppose Peters is afraid you'll bark at him when he comes home too late, and ties you up while he's out. Never mind, dear," she went on, stroking the great, heavy head of the happy beast, whose tail was wagging with dull thumps on the sides of his kennel; "I've been crying too, dear. It's so stuffy down here."

Menelik lifted his head, and swept his great tongue over her chin, lips and nose. And Mary almost wept anew as she rubbed off his kiss with her handkerchief.

"We'll go and sleep up there, as we used to sleep long ago—before Il Corsaro came. That's much longer ago than when Blanche went away, isn't it? Different people get measured by different kinds of clocks, don't they, Menelik? You're younger than I am, and yet you're getting middle-aged, while I'm only beginning to find out what an awful long time it takes not to be young."

They were now well away from the house, and her spirits, she did not know why, were rising. She even laughed a little as they sped up the narrow path.

"Perhaps we shall find him up there, old dog—find Il Corsaro waiting for us, Menelik," she said; and tried to laugh again.

The poor girl, almost beside herself though she was with the surprise of passion in league with the disappointment of love, had yet, when she determined to spend the night in the place most strongly associated with their friendship, no faintest hope of there finding her lover. But the villa had never been her home; while the studio had, in these last weeks, become more homelike than ever. When Menelik uttered a whine of welcome at the nickname of the man he had almost made up his mind to love.

"No, dear," she explained. "He won't be there really, you know. It's too late. But we shall feel nearer to him, sha'n't we? And I can cry easier."

When they were inside the haven she had desired, it did not

seem so full of shelter as she had expected. But the climb had wearied her, and she felt at least less disinclined to lie down. It was long since she had used the studio as a sleeping chamber, but all she needed for the night was in the cupboard by the couch. She opened all the windows, saw that all the latticed green shutters were closed, lit a candle, and undressed. Then, deciding that the outside of her bed was on this night of oppressive heat the more attractive, she went again to the cupboard and fetched from it a soft white dressing-gown, which she drew on over her nightgown. She said good-night to her dog, opened the door, and made him lie outside on guard. And even as she stood for a moment on the threshold she thought of her candle, and blew it out, wishing she had extinguished it before she had opened the door. Quickly and softly she closed it again, turned the key in the lock, went to the alcove under the high north window, flung back the curtains, and threw herself face downwards upon the broad, green-covered couch that lay in the hollow behind them.

As she fell upon the hidden bed, she feared very honestly that she must now weep again, or sleep—and she did not know which she dreaded the more. Tears she knew only as a pain added to grief, and sleep had but lately betrayed her. But the few drops which fell down her cheeks had welled up through closed eyelids, clenched slowly tighter till they dammed the waters of Marah. And there came to her yet again "The Harlequin of Dreams," with his wand cut this time from a certain ancient tree; and the waters were made sweet.

Now long before the woman's spirit floated joyous on the surface of waters mounting slowly to the high and perilous edge of catastrophe, Randolph Bethune had passed the little stone road-bridge, descended into the stony river-bed, and was climbing towards her between the stony olive-terraces.

Thought of meeting there was no more in his head than in hers. Waking in a clear-headed agony of remorse for the pain to both of them of which he gave himself all the blame, he had written her a letter. He had frankly addressed her by her Christian name, which he had learned, though he had never told her he had learned it, from that same copy of Longfellow which had had a share in the making of their friendship. "To Mary, from her affectionate sister Blanche," had told even more than that she bore the name of the first of women. The name of the sister who gave was a chapter of biography in itself—and the gift a foot-note of much illumination.

So the "Mary" had come, though for the first time, easily enough to his pen. A hundred times in the last fortnight had he almost called her by the name that suits no woman ill. And always he had checked the word upon his lips—at one time for her sake, at another for his own, who loved to treasure his little secret of the name which added, if adding were possible, a certain sweetness to the sweetness of the flower.

But when it came to envelope, stamp, and all the requirements of the Italian post-office, he found his knowledge mere ignorance, even as his wisdom had proved, perhaps, worse than folly.

Who would believe that here was Randolph Bethune—and a girl that he loved—a girl whom he loved so much that he knew it his duty to say good-bye to her—good-bye in the way that she herself had said was like dying—and that he did not know enough about her to address her through the post?

And yet this was the simple fact—a fact that to him was accounted for in the simplest and most natural way.

At last he wrote upon the envelope: *Alla Signorina Maria Samaritana*; and set out at once for the studio, to leave it there for her to find—on her easel, if the door were unfastened, on her doorstep, if he found himself shut out. That she had ever made a practice of spending her nights up there on the ridge, he did not know.

Yet his heart beat with a throb of sudden violence, when, at the sharp turn of the path which had brought him so often to the chestnut grove, he came in sight of the candle-lit doorway of the studio. His next step brought the bole of a tree between him and the unexpected illumination; when he had passed the tree, all was dark again. He thought he had been deceived by a distant light shining upon a window; or by some trick of his own imagination. But the brief flash of Mary's candle had set him wondering what he would have done, had he indeed found her where he meant to leave his letter. And, though this line of thought brought him to no conclusion, it served unconsciously to soften his footfall as he drew near the door of the studio.

This footfall was a sound which Menelik knew so well that, though he rose to his feet with ears erect directly it struck them, he neither growled nor barked, but awaited with tense body and wagging tail the approach which he believed even more welcome to his mistress than it was to himself. It

was only when he perceived that Bethune did not see him that he let escape a low whine of greeting. In a moment Bethune's caressing hand had found the solemn head, and the man seated himself on the low step of the door with the contented dog at his feet.

Even yet he had no suspicion that the girl was near him. The dog, he thought, being let loose at night, had found his way to this familiar spot, driven up from the valley by the great heat, which the storm had not lasted long enough to cool. But the place held him, and the sympathetic presence of the boar-hound. In front of him was nothing but the wastes of London and Africa. Here for awhile, before leaving his letter, he might linger, with his back to the door she would open to-morrow as she had opened it yesterday, and within reach of his hand the animal whose ears and muzzle she would so fondle with those long white fingers that a man knew it better to be in Africa, since he could not be her dog.

As he sat, the longing for her grew in him. And as it grew he became less willing to go back to the dreary *Trattoria d'España*, there to fret wakeful, till the long, slow-footed hours should take him to the hot, slow-crawling train. Why should he not sit here at least till it was dawn?

So he lit his pipe, and talked softly to her dog.

"Pity you can't speak, Menelik," he said, gently scratching the head which rested on his feet. "You could give her messages, you know. She would listen to you better and more kindly than she would to me. You have the best of it all round, old dog. If she were to send you away from her down the hill, you needn't go any further than your kennel. She's sent me to South Africa—as if she were the North Pole, old boy, and I a rather small iceberg. Every day till you die she'll stroke your head. Sometimes she'll play with you. Sometimes she'll laugh at you. You'll never know what it is to long for her—to long for a merest glimpse of the distant beauty of her.

"You'll have all you can have. I shall have nothing. And yet, Menelik, in the end I shall have had more than you."

Something in his companion's voice seemed to touch the dog with a sympathetic emotion. Once or twice already he had stirred restlessly; now he rose to his feet, and uttered a subdued but very mournful howl. Bethune laughed, felt for the animal's head and took it between his hands with a movement of rough gratitude. And then, knowing less than the

dog knew, he went on with his foolish murmur of half ironical confidences.

Now, whether the earlier sound of his voice, subdued though it was, had penetrated her sleeping ears, or whether the sleeping mind followed without external suggestion the lead of her desires, it is certain that Mary dreamed herself waiting somewhere in the moonlight. And the man she waited for was surely coming; already she could see his distant figure toiling up a hill to meet her; and the joy of the meeting, now so certain, was swelling in her heart till it grew to a pain. It is the moment when such dreams break—the moment when the artist-brain gives up in despair the supremely difficult task of painting realized happiness. But it was Menelik's low howl just outside her door which seemed the cause of her sudden awaking; and she rose to find out what was the matter with her sentry. As she moved across the dark room towards the door, that other and heavier darkness, which her sleep had broken for a while, returned upon her in overwhelming flood. By some physical consequence of her pain, she felt that even a candle-flame might ease the horrible pressure of the loneliness; when she had found matches and candle, she would call Menelik to come in to her.

So softly did she move about the big room, and so gently was the door opened behind him, that the man sitting on the step heard nothing. But upon the grizzled muzzle of the dog and the blinking eyes above it there fell a sudden light. Bethune was in the midst of a tenderly ironic description of their mistress, and turned abruptly to meet her face to face.

"Good God!" he cried as he rose to his feet. "What are you doing here?"

"I don't know," said Mary. "Trying to sleep—but I dreamt you were coming. Why did you go away like that?"

"You sent me," said Bethune.

"Oh, yes. But that wasn't any reason. I had to do something. You needn't—" and she broke down, stammering. For Bethune's eyes were on hers with a gaze she could neither endure nor avoid.

He stooped suddenly and put out the candle. And Mary found she could speak better in the dark.

"I was dreaming that you were coming back," she said, speaking very softly. "I saw you coming up the hill. And then Menelik howled, and I woke and found the dream was true."

"It wasn't true," answered Bethune, making a last struggle to keep faith with himself, and achieving at least a harshness of tone which Mary found too unlike him to be frightened by it. "I came to bring you a letter. If I'd known you were here, I should not have come."

"Why did you blow out the candle?" she asked.

"To make it easier to say good-bye," answered the man.

"Don't go," cried the girl; and the ring of passion in her voice thrilled him through the mail of obstinacy which was his last safeguard.

"I must go—you know I must," he persisted.

The night hung over them darker than ever. Menelik, having no ethic code but love and faith to his friends, was now sleeping at their feet, happy in the belief that his intimate goddess had her heart's desire.

Of her Bethune could perceive a vague, tall whiteness, raised above him by the six inches of the stone step and the two of the wooden sill. But of him Mary could see nothing, unless it were a sort of thinness in the night which might have been his face. But so keenly conscious was she of his presence that the hand she put out lighted unerringly on his arm, exactly as she would have laid it there in broadest daylight.

At the unexpected contact Bethune shuddered.

"You needn't—not yet," she pleaded. "I've—I've been crying—crying most horribly."

The long white fingers, of which he had spoken to Menelik, closed sharply on his arm.

And with that, in a voice so clear and softly penetrating that its low pitch had no likeness to a whisper.

"Come in," she said.

"Let go," cried Bethune harshly. The man was quite unconscious of the roughness which pain gave to his speech. But her instinct interpreted his asperity with literal accuracy, and her fingers tightened their clasp.

"I'm afraid," he said, pleading with her.

"Of what?" asked Mary.

"Of you."

"Why?"

"Of me, then," said Bethune, shifting his ground; and he laid his right hand upon her right with intent to loosen it from his left arm. But, when he felt hers beneath it, he let it lie.

"I'm not afraid of you," said the girl, as the palm of her

left hand found the back of his right; and again, and with two hands she drew him.

"I daren't," he muttered, now barely resisting.

"Then," said Mary, "you don't love me."

"I do nothing else," said Bethune.

"I love you," she replied with exquisite sweetness and deliberation. "And there's nothing I'm afraid of."

One last effort he made.

"I can't—I daren't," he repeated, "—unless—"

"There's no 'unless'. Oh, can't you see how unhappy I am?"

So he followed her into the dark room, closing the door on the darkness without.

Once more the tiny flame of the candle showed them each the other's face. And between the two pairs of eyes there dawned again that light which they had seen together yesterday on the hillside.

And now the great darkness seemed a friend. While it lasted, there was no other life, no other world, no other light but here in its heart.

CHAPTER XI

THE BROKEN VESSEL

WHEN the light came struggling through the green filter of the outside shutters, it found the conscience of Randolph Bethune almost before it had opened his eyes.

So beautiful were the things it revealed to the eye of his flesh, and so terrible to his spiritual vision, that his hurried movements in preparation for flight were subdued to a cat-like stealth and noiselessness. At the last, though he did not even dare to touch once more with his own either the cheek or lip which had seemed so little while ago his for ever, he did, greatly daring, lift the hand which lay half open in a curl as expectant as it was reminiscent; he knew that the fingers were bent as his hand had left them—knew that they would close again round his if he should set his palm to hers. But he laid the hand again beside her without clasping it, looked for a moment at the great diamond he had left shining there, and went swiftly out into the chestnut grove, noiselessly closing the door behind him.

Menelik rose, yawned and stretched himself. Bethune passed him with a word of tenderness, to which he added, over his shoulder, a stern command to lie down and stay where he was.

The light was horribly white out here. In the studio it had been tempered to a vague greenness. Oh, but the whiteness of it was cruel and unrelenting!

Surely this was the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He began to run, afraid with a cowardice quite new to him. The surface of his mind told him that he ran lest the woman should wake—should see and call to him. Should she call never so softly, he would hear; and if he heard, he must go back and face the eyes of her love. But deeper than this lay a symbolic reason for the speed of his flight down the hill. He ran to escape his sin. But even the hurrying feet knew they carried all that burden—had left none of it behind the green shutters up there on the ridge. As his pace slackened, Bethune

lit.

heard the padding sound of Menelik's pursuing gallop, with the rattle of scattered stones. He stopped and patted the panting beast, and bade him go back and take care of his mistress. With head raised plaintively skyward, the hound sank upon his haunches, and howled softly. It was the long-drawn whine, momentous in its consequence, of the night before. It came to Bethune's comprehension somehow that the animal knew when his mistress slept.

"He doesn't want me to go—and he doesn't want to wake her," he thought, and went down the hill. After some dozen strides he looked back. The dog was trotting, crest and tail drooping, back to his sleeping mistress. And the sight of the dog made the man sick with shame.

Some hours later he seemed to himself to be emerging from a blurred fog of distress. He was the only occupant of his compartment in the railway carriage. The train was yet some thirteen miles short of Genoa. He looked through the window on his left, seaward, and saw the blue headland which hid all his joy and all his sin in its hidden creases. Dumbly he found himself praying that all evil consequence of his passion might fall on himself. Yet even as he prayed, he knew it could not be so; but he did not know how far greater his share of suffering was to be than hers. For he was to have no counter-weight. In balance of joy and sorrow—perhaps in the dependence of the one upon the other—lie, if not happiness itself, yet certainly its blessed approaches.

At Sestri, outside Genoa, he woke from a doze to clear memory of his dream. In it he had been a man that robbed a church. He had lain outside the sacred building, crouching in a ditch, with the holy vessels hugged tight beneath his coat.

It was evening, and he had seen the faint light of candles spring up behind the old, jewel-coloured windows. There was a bell ringing, which he first knew with its final stroke. Then came to him faint and lovely chords of music; voices, first one and then many in unison.

In a last ray of light from the west, he saw the white flash of wings, and a pigeon settling on the roof-tree of the church.

And the thief rose trembling, resolved to restore the silver vessels into the hands of the priest, before the eyes of pious men and women. But on the threshold of the door the vessels cracked and crumbled in his fingers, till there was nothing left but a white powder. And a little gust of wind arose, blowing even the ashes out of his hands.

All that long, miserable journey, whether he were asleep, awake, or wandering on the hazy confines of the two conditions, brain, conscience and fatigue wove thought, reverie and dreams into stuff of this pattern.

The morals of most men are compromise; at this place or that each has drawn his line, which he believes he will not cross. Even in his heart Randolph Bethune was no boaster; but there had been times when his self-esteem, in need of reassurance, had drawn it from the thought that the world's sum total of female innocence was no less for any act of his. Yet now, by an apparent paradox which for the moment he made no attempt to unravel, the woman was on a pedestal for his worship, while he himself had sunk many graded steps below that platform upon whose level he and the maid had stood as equals. The world's judgment would throw her in the mud, if one gave it the chance—would smile discreetly and help him without any fuss to brush from his clothes such spots as might cling to them from the honest upward protest of that moral element. In his own scheme of things—since he thought little of the world's—they should have fallen together, with his greater buoyancy and strength supporting her weakness. But the result, so far as his mind was concerned—and for the moment the circle of his egoism was all that counted—the result was as surprising as it was distressing. He had respected virginity, as he thought, for its weakness. In a moment where passion was supported by circumstances powerful in temptation, he had murdered what he had said he respected. When, lo! the woman had risen out of his reach—no less pure than before, but lifted above him by the chastity of love and the glory of self-abnegation. Her fault, if any fault had been hers, had lain in taking him for a god; his, in forgetting that she was a goddess.

Those few, short hours of that dark, hot Italian night were, however, the only hours of his life in which he could be said to have forgotten her divinity. It is, indeed, scarcely just to the man to be positive in ascribing to him even that short forgetfulness. For passion has been known, not once only nor twice, to make a man think himself a god.

This rough epitome of his thoughts includes conclusions reached by this unhappy lover only after he knew that the Cape was nearer than England.

The conclusions were no doubt hastened, late as in fact they came or were arrived at, by the episode of his last walk

up Bond Street. For in that expensive and uncomfortable thoroughfare there was in those days a certain notable gunsmith's shop. And Randolph Bethune's host and friend, John Whiteman Hardy, having found himself unable to persuade his benefactor and *protégé* into the purchase of a new-fangled sporting rifle of a penetrating power then wholly astonishing, had resolved to increase his friend's luggage by yet a further gift. The gifts were already so numerous that Hardy had a certain hesitancy in the matter of this last. So Bethune was tempted out of Piccadilly, two days before he sailed, into Bond Street.

Even as he entered it he remembered the costume and overbearing carriage of The Corsair in that caricature. He was indeed no swaggerer. But there lay the genius of the thing. For just so would he have swaggered, had swaggering been among his gifts.

He almost laughed to himself as he remembered the finding of that torn sheet of parodies. His spirit was lighter to-day—something like hope seemed rising in him.

Three dreary weeks had his new employer kept him kicking his heels in England while his one immediate desire was to be gone from it as far as he could get. His sailing was but two days distant; and it was perhaps the sense of coming liberty and new work that made him imagine far possibilities of success, reparation and happiness. Three weeks ago, as his train passed through the dreariest suburb of Paris in the dreariest hour of an ugly, weeping dawn, it had come to his mind as a kind of bitter jest that even now he had no name but her first by which to reach the woman he had fled from.

Then he had told himself that it did not matter; nothing could bring him, while he lived, the occasion or the courage to use it.

But now, as they drew near the shop of the gunsmith, things seemed different, and he vowed he would discover who she was. There was Madame Guerinadi of the *Trattoria d'España*; she would tell him. But here his thought was broken by Whiteman Hardy's voice, bidding him enter the shop where guns were sold. And then a carriage drove by them; and leaning back in it, on the side nearest to him, more beautiful, he thought, than the most beautiful of his memories of her, Bethune saw the woman whose name he did not know and whose memory he was never to escape.

Between them was the narrow width of the Bond Street pavement; their eyes met, his hat was lifted, and she was gone.

"It's worth while for a girl to be pale, when she can blush so adorably," said his friend. And the words came to Bethune as from a great distance. "So you know them, eh?"

"Know whom?" asked Bethune, vaguely.

"The Frozier women, of course. What are you dreaming of?" asked his friend, impatiently. "Why, I just saw Lady Mary bow to you—and you lifted your hat."

"Oh, yes," said Bethune, wearily. "I have met Lady Mary Frozier once or twice. I was thinking of something else when you spoke."

"Then you don't know your luck," said Hardy. "It's the girl's first season, and they tell me she's going to be a most astonishing success."

"I can hardly see what difference that can make to a poor devil like me," replied Bethune. "Even if I were going to be in England, I should never be nearer to the beauty than I was just now."

Whiteman Hardy would have given much to get a bow and a smile, not to mention the blush, from Lady Mary Frozier. He was secretly annoyed with Bethune, because he offered no details of his acquaintance with this young woman for whom so brilliant a social future had been prophesied.

"Who was that in the carriage with her?" asked Bethune.

"Her sister—half-sister, Lady Blanche Le Dane. She didn't see you, I think," said Hardy. "She was looking the other way."

"She wouldn't have seen me, whatever way she had looked," replied Bethune. "I have never met her." And, without displaying too much interest, he managed to draw from his friend a sketch of the Frozier family history; hearing, with a heart that slowly sank lower and lower, all the details which the willing Hardy could give him of the wealth and distinction of the Ingestow peerage, the matrimonial adventures of the aged earl, and the considerable private fortunes of the two sisters of the baby heir to the title, little Viscount Wrotham.

He heard it all with intelligence strung to the highest pitch; but so utterly did he ignore his informant's obvious desire for payment in kind, that Hardy thought him absent-minded.

As he chattered on, still hoping for the story of Bethune's meeting with Lady Mary Frozier, Hardy made a remark which seemed to leave a scar behind it all the way from the listener's ear to his heart.

"They're bringing her out very young," he said. "She looks old enough, of course, but she's hardly over seventeen."

"She's a good deal more than that," said Bethune, quietly.

"It's in Burke," replied Hardy. And Bethune felt the weight on his soul doubled by the knowledge that the woman whom his love had failed to protect from his passion was barely more than a child.

This discovery of Mary's wealth, station and youth clinched with final strokes of hopelessness his resolve—which had wavered more than once—to disappear utterly from her horizon. He would not, now that he could, even write her a letter. And if she thought ill of him—for now she must think it possible for him to discover her name—if she thought ill, why, surely for her the worst thoughts were the best.

So it was a man unhappy as can well be imagined who left England two days later on the journalistic mission of M'Cormick and *The Illustrated Examiner*. And he carried with him two things: an inward brand from the searing-iron of his own selfishness that was never till his death to leave him; and the memory of a white heaven attained by some means of stealth which, since they had not existed, he found it impossible to recall; a heaven of love the more sweet and of whiteness the whiter for his inevitable and irrevocable ejection. The vision, which had once been fact—and there were moments when, for all his repentance, the mere man's imagination of him cherished the glory of having been once admitted—this vision was to stay with him at least as long as that scar of the hot iron.

Here and there about the world were people who wondered silently what had come over Randolph Bethune. Had they been told the bare facts of the story, they would, on their knowledge of the man, have called them lies.

"She has given me," he once felt inclined to say to a woman—but had a stronger inclination to silence, and kept it, even while the words were almost audible to his own ears; "—she has given me what the world would say I had taken from her. But gift cancels theft, and it's not by giving that things are lost."

Of all these things Lady Mary Frozier told to her son so much as she knew. At Bethune's point of view she could do no more than guess. But her presentment of his case was an advocate's.

Much that has been here written she could not tell, because she did not know it. Much, too, there was which she told to Anthony that Friday afternoon, of the dreadfully domestic, the tragically intimate, which it serves to record but in the briefest summary. And more yet, of suffering secret and sacred which even the man that was son of her pain must believe, not look upon.

There was her first season—the “coming-out,” to which the girl had always secretly and sedately looked forward—sprung suddenly upon her by Lady Blanche; for Lady Blanche was happy in her husband’s latest and last flicker of health, and worried in the maternal part of her sisterly soul by the pale cheeks of her idol. There followed the interruption of that season, which may as truly, in the fashionable sense, be called her last as her first, by the *débutante*’s ill-health. The untimely departure into Cornwall was quickly followed by the sudden death of the good and unimportant Colonel Le Dane. And still, when that loss already began to seem an old story, Mary’s health was so far from improving, that Blanche was led at last to the inevitable discovery that this was no ill-health at all. Prostrated by what was, for a loving and orderly soul, perhaps as heavy a blow as could strike it, she yet managed in a few days to recover not only control of herself, but also of the situation. The younger sister was astonished to find that the campaign against the eyes and ears of the world was to be conducted without intestine recrimination. And Mary from the first was willing enough—too willing, she was afterwards to find—to give Blanche her way in all things, so long as she herself might keep her mind peaceful and her body healthy for the thing that was coming; and keep beside her, when it was come, the thing no longer to be thought nor spoken of as neuter or impersonal. It was, as Mary very soon discovered, a suppressed characteristic in her sister, rather than Lady Blanche Le Dane herself, which in the early days was her strongest friend. To her fate had refused children; and all her potential motherhood sprang to life at the promise of a child which should take away what she was old-fashioned enough to consider her blame amongst women.

Of the scheme by which Anthony, six months after Colonel Le Dane’s death, was introduced to himself and the world as the posthumous son of the man who had desired a son in vain, it is unnecessary to give the rather sordid detail. Blanche conceived at least the plan and Mary,

much as at first she disliked it, found herself forced to acquiesce.

Dr Trethewy's keen eye became to Lady Blanche as the eye of an enemy; and it was in a lonely house near an obscure Welsh village that Anthony's troubles began. Beyond his two mothers, the real and the reputed, only three people knew the truth—a young doctor, a monthly nurse, and old Agnes. The man, seduced rather by pity for the beautiful and unfortunate girl whose name he never knew, than by money, was now risen to a position which was guarantee of his secrecy; the nurse had taken much money, and kept her secret till death took charge of it; and old Agnes, before she died, had almost yielded to the delusion of the tragical comedy in whose unflinching presentation she had spent the end of her life.

In the spring of the year 1884, when Anthony had passed into his fourth year, Lady Blanche Le Dane died. For Mary this was release; release not only from a life of restraint which had grown to something very like servitude, but emancipation also from a haunting dread of the loss of her sister's love, and of danger, perhaps, to the happiness of her little son.

The gradual estrangement of the sisters began in the pouring out of all the elder woman's pent maternity upon the baby; the cleft was widened by the jealousy which, within three weeks, would force her to leave the room, rather than look upon Mary feeding her child. Before the first year was over, Mary knew that reference even the most secret to the facts was the signal for a week's coldness between them, if it were not the occasion of a scene which was only not a quarrel because the poor girl was too proud to strike back and too loving to forget. She had, indeed, her compensation, for the child showed a never wavering preference for her whom he was taught to call aunt. But, to keep on good terms with Blanche, Mary was driven to teach her tiny lover that their caresses and most of their games must be enjoyed in secret. Then Blanche would accuse her of "setting the child against her," and the poor mother dared not reply with the truth.

"I do believe," she would mutter into the softest creases of his thriving body, "—I do really believe, Baby, she's getting to think you are really hers."

Freed by her sister's death, however, from the fear of seeing her unacknowledged son grow to manhood in an atmosphere of jealousy and dissension, Lady Mary felt as if death had given her back her sister. The unhappiness which had come

with little Anthony's intrusion faded, while the ancient sheltering love towered from the past high above the plains of recent offence. This readjustment of feeling was confirmed by the generous terms of the elder sister's will. That the boy should inherit, by an instrument so ingeniously devised that no revelation of facts could upset its provisions, all the property left by his reputed parents, was in itself, no doubt, gratifying to the mother. But that Blanche had smoothed all the future for her by leaving the boy and all his possessions as entirely in the secret mother's control as by legal foresight and phraseology could be determined, brought tears of gratitude and final forgiveness to Mary's eyes.

"Poor dear!" she said to herself. "She was just to me, as well as generous to little Tony. I wonder whether they will give her real babies all of her own in Heaven."

The ensuing five years she spent in Paris, with her child and her brushes to keep her heart from breaking.

BOOK III
THE TRINITY



CHAPTER I

THE FRIDAY NIGHT

IT was, then, a shorter story than this which has been told, that Anthony heard from his mother's lips that Friday afternoon; a story vivid in places, and convincing throughout with the gleam of a love which time had not dimmed; so that he knew, against the will of his angry heart, that the devotion she had given him from childhood was no mere transference to the newcomer of an affection killed by the wrong his father had done to her, but rather the offspring of the earlier love which lived and increased in her heart with the growth of her lover's son. Through all the years, she told him without any consciousness of the revelation, she had nourished the older love on the presence and person of her son; while to the new love she added the strength and tenacity of inheritance.

Angry as he was, anger was not the worst of it. Anthony was nothing, if not logical. And so it came about that his anger against the man whom he had almost, if not quite, loved before he knew him for his father; his inevitable indignation at the discovery of his illegitimate birth; his sorrow for the social wrong done to his mother—all these were things which, however natural and right it was that he should feel them, yet afforded him no standing-ground for judgment nor action. The points of the story his mother had told him were the premisses of a syllogism; he, Anthony, was the conclusion; and one cannot, he reflected, outside *Alice in Wonderland*, imagine a valid conclusion setting up as critic of its premisses. An English sovereign cannot claim divine prerogative without going behind the Act of Settlement and so destroying the source of such power as he enjoys; and it is only the man who can honestly say that he were better dead, and who is willing to back his word with his deed, that may fairly say: "My father did wrong to beget, my mother to conceive me."

That he perceived this aspect of the case did nothing, however, to make Anthony's mood more philosophic. For he saw whither those considerations would lead him; to the conclusion, namely, that his sole legitimate grievance was against his mother, for the twenty-four years of deception; after

which, the surprise of truth struck him now so cruel a blow. And it was especially against his mother that he was determined no grievance should be acknowledged. For, in the whole dreadful business, this mother was his one gain; when he had said it was better to be hers so than another's otherwise, he had comforted her with the truth.

It was nearer eight o'clock than seven, when Lady Mary came to an end.

For some minutes she watched her son's face, as if expecting him to speak.

"I know," she said at last, very softly, with eyes wonderfully shining and a voice sounding very close to tears, "—I know you must be—you can't help being very angry."

Anthony's silence was affirmative.

"Then it must be with me."

"It's you last of all," cried Anthony. "You not at all, I mean."

"Dear boy," she began—and checked herself. "If I may call you that now, when I've told you—told you how—that I'm not what he called me—not *la bonne Samaritaine* any more—but only—only something like the woman of Samaria."

Anthony leapt to his feet.

"I won't have it," he cried. "That's the only thing I'll never forgive you."

"What?" asked his mother, trembling as she rose to face him—trembling as much with hope as with fear of his meaning.

"If you use bad words of yourself to me—to anyone—if you even think bad thoughts of yourself," the boy cried, "I shall go away—go away for longer than—"

His words were more cruel than his intent. Since he did not at the moment mean to tell her his purpose, he checked the words—but checked them a little too late.

"Oh, Tony!" she moaned, and caught her breath with the first half of a sob.

And Anthony wanted to fall at her feet and beg forgiveness. But he steeled himself to answer wisely.

"Then sit down," he said, "and never say again—never think again—an unkind thing of the only person I worship—except God. And He," the boy added with a smile, "is included, because I know Him only through your introduction."

For this she reproved him, laughing, womanlike, at the audacity which held irreverence only apparent.

"The woman of Samaria," said Anthony, "had a past of

probably hideous variety, and a present of unchastity. So I repeat that I will not have her compared with a martyr of constancy. No woman, as I see things, mother," he added, "is unchaste, who sticks for a lifetime, without a side-glance, to the man she has chosen."

"To the man who has chosen her," said Lady Mary, correcting him. And a gentle glow came to her cheek, as if her son were God, and had given her again her jewel.

Her son saw it, and took her in his arms.

"All the same," she said, "it is I you should blame. You were so reasonable and clear-headed, even as a tiny boy, Tony, that I had to be so too—or try to be. You are you because of whose you are, and of how you came to be so. But I have deceived you—both as to the *whose* and the *how*."

"That," said Anthony, "was poor Aunt Blanche."

To hear him call Blanche Le Dane "Aunt" was too much for the mother. Nothing else for the moment seemed to matter. Mary had suffered so long beneath the brand of that horrid word that she now, being in his arms, dug her fingernails into his shoulders, hid her face on his coat-sleeve, and laughed and wept in distressing combination.

Then, approaching self-control, she began to feel guilty.

"Poor, large, tight, pale woman!" said Anthony. "I can hardly remember her, but I'm beginning to be rather fond of her."

"Why?" asked his mother.

"Because she's only my aunt," he said, so increasing Lady Mary's joy that he saw the necessity of slackening the tension.

"We'll have dinner now. You'll excuse my morning coat," he said, knowing she would have dined with him wearing pyjamas, but wishing to bring the talk back to the commonplace.

"I love that coat—you know I do," she answered. "But I don't want to eat."

"I do," said the boy, lying. "And you will have to stoke. You ought to know by this time, that I never can eat if you don't."

The stoking, however, was done by male youth, and the good dinner eaten by the woman of middle age. She ate because a strain and a pressure was removed; he had to spend three efforts upon a mouthful, because there had fallen upon him, along with a time-honoured visitation, the mother to love as well as her sins to bear.

But the mother was not all. Dinner eaten, therefore, he begged to smoke his first cigarette in the studio.

"Won't you come to the drawing-room, Tony?" she asked. And the very name he knew best on her lips came to him with a new sweetness.

"I like the old place best," he said. "I feel so rich with a real, live mother of my own."

In the studio he made her lie on the sofa.

"I don't suppose," he went on "that I could have loved you more if I'd known all the time. But there's a difference, somehow. I wonder how many pet names I should have had for you, dear, if I'd grown up making them."

His mother rose and brought him a match for his unlighted cigarette.

"So I wanted to smoke this," he said, "—my first after-dinner smoke with my mother, you see—I wanted it in here, as a kind of triumph over the old room and the old times that have been hiding a part of you from me all these years."

He sat with her awhile, speaking gently now and again.

When his cigarette was done, he rose.

"Are you going to be an obedient mother?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, dear," she answered softly and fervently. "It will save so much trouble. I'll do anything you tell me."

"I'm going now," said Anthony. "There's something to be done, and I can't put it off. But I want to see you again to-night. Perhaps I shall be late. You're awfully tired. So I want you to put on something soft and comfy—a tea-gown or something—and make yourself cosy here on the sofa till I come back. I wouldn't leave you this evening if I could help it, dear—indeed I wouldn't. But I must—and I shouldn't be happy if I didn't see you again to-night."

"You dear boy!"

"You don't mind, then?"

"Of course I don't mind. I shall like waiting here for you. It will be the first evening I've had anything to look forward to—the first for a great many years, Tony. All the time, you know, I haven't even dared to look forward to you—I mean, to hearing you call me—call me what you have called me to-night," said Lady Mary. "I know you're thinking I'd better have told you all about it long ago. But Blanche—well, Blanche was good to you—and Blanche's first and last idea was that you were never to know. The very temptation to speak, dear, made it seem more like duty to hold my tongue."

Anthony nodded his comprehension. After a little pause,

"Oh, yes, dear," repeated his mother, "I shall be quite happy waiting for you."

So he kissed her again, called her by the name of whose sound she had been starved so long, and went out.

Left alone, Mary did all he had bidden her, taking keen pleasure in her obedience.

For more than half an hour after she returned to it, she moved softly about her studio, sometimes visiting the little drawer where she kept the old sketch-book, sometimes taking a book from the shelf; trying now this chair, now that; pleased with everything, satisfied with none. There was, in truth, a hope, or at least, a vague expectancy in her mind; and it made her restless. As she had told Anthony, it was so long since she had looked forward!

She laid herself at last on the couch again, telling herself there was no danger of falling asleep. It seemed now less wicked to think of Porto Finaggio. While her eyes were open, therefore, she did think of it, and dreamed of it when they were closed.

That evening Randolph Bethune sat in the big room of the small hotel. It was the room with the wide window overlooking the river; that same room where Axel Forsberg had made his acquaintance by force, so bringing him to the meeting with the young fellow who now occupied most of his thought. The boy was so like—so wonderfully like, at times—to the woman whose short friendship had been of all things in his life the sweetest, leaving behind it, outside the sudden curtain of its extinction, more than two decades of lonely remorse. But the picture of those blue and golden days, with their tacit secrecy and their rapid growth of love, with their ending in a day of storm and passion, was quite unfaded in his mind. For the loneliness had kept it bright with a frame of contrast, and the remorse could not tell him of what he had done without keeping him ever in remembrance of what he had possessed.

To-night he was once more in pain, as Forsberg had found him. There was a weight, too, on his spirit, which neither the injured nerves nor his older memories could account for. He had hoped, earlier in the evening, that the boy with Mary's smile would come to him. Perhaps he was with her now—with his aunt of whom he spoke with so much tenderness. And Bethune remembered how he had been invited to 7B

Cheyne Walk, and wished that he had not refused to go for fear of the sudden shock to the woman who, he believed never learned his name, had made him decline. How he spent the awful wastes of time between that day and the next, in a struggle, most likely, to forget; or perhaps in the process of forgetting. The process, he thought, was both profitable and inevitable, if you are of those to be so; while the struggle is self-defeated from the beginning.

"However it has gone with her," he mused, "I will not go there. If she hates me for what she lost—has forgotten everything but the mere, miserable, far-off—is all one. It wouldn't do her any good. She must be settled into grooves of some kind by this time. Nothing but happiness can do without them."

He rose wearily from the deep chair, dropped his head to the floor, and limped painfully to the window.

The curtains were not drawn over it, but the lower part was closed. He threw it up, leaned across his arms upon the sill, and breathed deeply of the night air.

"But perhaps," he murmured, "happiness itself is a groove—of a calibre which does not often fit your stone."

He heard a hand on the door, and turned in time to see Anthony enter his room.

The only light came from the electric reading-lamp which stood beside his chair, facing the door. A few minutes before he had risen, the green shade had been tilted to keep the light from his eyes; and this light now fell full upon the man's face as he stood in front of the door he had just entered. Bethune was in the shadow, and while Anthony, with his momentarily dazzled eyes, tried to search the room for him, the man saw the face of the younger, and his light word of greeting died before it reached his lips.

He went slowly to the switch of the central cluster of lamps.

"I am here, Le Dane," he said quietly. "Is anything the matter?"

The room filled with light, and Anthony looked at the man a moment before he answered. Bethune, though he could not read the look, yet knew that there was in it something of the anger, which he had never seen before. Though his face was unaltered, his heart seemed to stand still.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Anthony.

"Very well," answered Bethune, quietly, giving no sign of the effort it cost him to speak.

"Very ill," said the youth, "unless you know who begot me."

"Well?" asked the man, mystified and horribly expectant of he knew not what. He felt himself tremble, and breathed deep.

"You," said Anthony. "You are my father."

His son's words struck Bethune like a bullet; for this that they told him is among the most awful of the things in human knowledge. And so he cried instinctively upon the greatest of the things which are beyond it.

"O Christ!" he said. "Then—then—then—" and so broke off.

"And Lady Mary Frozier," continued the voice of his son, "is my mother."

Bethune said never a word. One hand gripped the edge of a book-shelf, and his eyelids drooped. And when Anthony saw the white wave of pain overwhelm the face marked already so deeply by the graving-tools of action and suffering, there moved within him the throb of an emotion very strange—so strange, indeed, that he would have thought it entirely new but for its resemblance to another feeling which had seemed antagonistic to any sympathy with the man before him.

He put emotion resolutely aside, and, with a kind of cold gentleness as for a thing which took all its value to him from its worth to another, he made Bethune sit in the chair he brought him.

The dark eyes opened almost directly, and seemed to burn into his own with an intensity which Anthony found hard to sustain. In this gaze there was no shame, no appeal, but rather some character so compelling that all else was swallowed and forgotten in it. The shock which Anthony had given, and the first effects of which he had seen and interpreted as pain, was tremendous indeed in its force and unexpectedness. But it was in truth the shock of joy—of the great elementary joy in the fulfilment of Nature's universal and eternal intent. The primal force of this passion, rudimentary in some, and developed highly in others, is recognised more or less unconsciously in the daily life and traditional judgments of all races. Our heroes and sages we cannot suffer to boast of courage or wisdom. But the least of men is excused, and the greatest loved the better when, with his first-born first in his arms,

he struts vainglorious as a bantam cock with the round earth for his dunghill.

To the surprise of this emotion a man is, by the nature of things, more open than a woman. And Randolph Bethune had not only never before felt its touch; he had not only lacked all preparation of time and circumstance such as attends its approach for most men; not only had he believed that to him this thing would never come at all; but it came to him in the person of a man full-grown—a man for his son whom of all men he would most have wished his impossible son to resemble. If the discovery of their relation shook the father, it is little wonder. But it says much for his strength that it was able to support his judgment in restraint of all expressed emotion.

His wrong-doing he had for the moment quite forgotten. The sense of it was absent for perhaps the first time since the wrong was done, drowned in what seemed to him the glory of its result, standing there before him.

But Anthony had hardened his heart. He had no clue to the feelings which had made the eyes of his father burn like hot coals. For his mother there had been chivalrous compassion, as well as the love which had overflowed in the joy of this closer possession. Yet, though he owed that mother to the man he had just shaken with what was an accusation of paternity rather than a claim to sonship—though this man had seemed, since he had first met him, a very man amongst men, he could not yet lay aside the illogical feeling that there was in his paternity something accidental. This feeling he dared not allow to become thought, because the direction of the thought was perceived intuitively, and he would not be led towards the insulting of his mother. The very liking—to call it by no stronger name—which he felt for Randolph Bethune, and even their likeness to each other, which he had been forced by the looking-glass to admit, acted for the time against a nearer approach. For he recognised them both as sources of temptation to forego the anger that was in his heart.

Bethune, then, had forgotten his remorse. But Anthony, who could not find, or at least could not so readily acknowledge his compensation, did not let his father long enjoy the respite from the pain which had lasted longer than the son had lived.

"You've got to come with me," he said.

"Yes?" said Bethune.

"To Cheyne Walk," added Anthony.

"If it's a message," said Bethune, speaking with deliberation to steady his voice, "I will come."

"It's not a message," answered his son. "But you will come. To add a day to twenty-four years is wickedness and cruelty."

He saw his father's face, and knew that his words had told him that he was not forgotten. And the sight increased for the moment the anger which he nursed even while he tried to suppress its signs.

"Oh, it's not for you," he broke out bitterly. "If anything else would do for her, except this that she won't ask me for, I don't think you'd have seen me for a long time, sir."

Bethune took his hat, and pulled a light coat over his evening dress. Anthony helped him courteously, and the father experienced a curious sensation as the son's hands touched his collar and shoulders.

"I'm ready," he said, turning to cut off the light. As his fingers found the switch, he saw that Anthony's face had flushed. He made up his mind to be more than ever careful; and he smiled as he followed the boy down the stairs.

They got into the waiting cab; but not till they had driven for some ten minutes did Anthony look at his watch. The interview had been shorter than he had expected. It was now barely half-past ten, and too early for his purpose. He raised the trap.

"I don't want to reach Cheyne Walk before eleven o'clock," he said to the man. "Drive where you like to fill up the time."

The trap fell, and Anthony turned to his companion.

"I hope you don't mind," he said politely. "I didn't know it was so early."

"Your time is mine," said Bethune.

Anthony said nothing, so his captive continued:

"Because it is hers. It is your compensation, I think, that you know Lady Mary Frozier, and can judge of her needs; even as it is my worst punishment that I might not know her now were I to meet her in the street."

In spite of his wrongs, Anthony's pity here rose against his anger.

"Oh, yes, you would," he said; and in spite of himself, enthusiasm crept into his voice. "She hasn't changed—hardly changed at all."

Bethune felt this assurance to be so generous—if, indeed, it

were not something better than generosity which had prompted it—that he forebore asking the nature of the evidence.

Anthony appreciated the reticence, and said something of old photographs.

"Ah—yes, I see," said Bethune, softly and vaguely; and silence closed again about them.

During the next half-hour Anthony had a growing sense of being in the presence of a greater sorrow and a larger hope than he could understand. He felt himself unaccountably small as he sat beside the man to whom he had meant to be so generous, even though compelled to withhold from him the love which he had surely not deserved. This smallness was a feeling which Anthony did not at all enjoy; and his bearing, when they alighted, was as frigid as his manner was correct.

He opened the door with his latch-key, and led the way through dark passages to the studio.

Very softly he opened the door. The only light in the room came from a reading-lamp on a table near the sofa, and some of it fell upon the long, reclining figure, draped in softest white, which told in all its graceful lines of the sleep which had come to the woman who waited for she knew not what. Her head was hidden from her son's eyes by the green shade of the lamp. But from the gently curved fingers of her left hand came the prismatic flash of a great stone whose story he had heard that afternoon, but whose brilliance he saw for the first time. With the discomfort of the man that has seen or heard things not meant for him, Anthony descended two steps of the little flight, and drew back against the rail, to let Bethune pass him.

"There are five steps," he said, in a low voice.

Bethune had seen the white figure and the hand, curled as when he had touched it last. And Anthony noticed that he went down to the floor of the room and crossed it to the couch without any sign of the painful limp with which he had made his way to the cab.

Intending to go out, Anthony remounted his two stairs to the door.

But as he did so his heart was torn with a frightful pang of jealousy; a passion so new to him, and attacking with force so great, and suddenness so overwhelming, that he turned quickly on the threshold with some wild, half-formed intent of undoing his evening's work—or of preventing, at least, its accomplishment.

And there stood the man he had brought, looking down upon the face Anthony could not see. In the mere outline of the figure was the very eloquence of a thirst beginning to quench its long agony—of a sight so long deferred to hungry eyes that they feared even the blinking of their lids might shatter the magic like an iridescent bubble blown by the breath of fancy from the foam of dreams.

From the tense pose of the man's body, Anthony seemed to divine the lines of his white face and the expression of the dark, burning eyes which were hidden from him. And the snake which had bitten him had its death-blow from the sympathy which sprang suddenly into life.

He forgot that he ought not to be where he stood. He was as busy for the moment with the new thing he was finding as his father with the treasure he had found again.

Slowly Bethune began to bend towards the half closed hand, till at last he rested upon one knee by the couch. But before his lips touched the fingers, if such were indeed their purpose, the white figure stirred; Lady Mary's right hand swept forward out of the darkness with a certainty of direction which told Anthony that her eyes were open; and the hand fell on the shoulder of the man half kneeling at her side. Then the fingers crept round the back of the dark head, and Anthony heard his mother's voice. And somehow it sounded to him the voice of a young girl.

"What a long time you have been!" she said.

CHAPTER II

INTO THE MORNING

ANTHONY closed the door silently, ashamed as an intruder upon sacred mysteries, yet happier than ever in his life before.

He found himself suddenly hungry, made his way to the dining-room, and fell to munching biscuits. In whisky and Apollinaris water he drank silent healths to those he had left together. Then he sat upon one chair with his heels upon a second, and thought of all the difficulties in which the past day's revelation must involve him. He wished he had a pipe with him. There was one in the studio, but that for the time was further away than the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. He found a cigar, however, and remembered as he lit it that he had thought of those coming troubles and difficulties before—in the cab going east, and again returning westward. But not as he thought of them now; for now they were merely things to be faced and overcome. Was it because in those two cab-drives he had forgotten there was tobacco in the world for soothing? Or was it that he had found something that did more than soothe?

His cigar was at its best when he remembered the letter he had written that afternoon to Elmira. But was it indeed no longer ago than this afternoon? A worldful of things had happened since that letter was posted. It had seemed as he wrote it a thing of tragic necessity. He thought of it now as something which had happened long ago; something that had to be done when he was a boy; an old duty remembered not without satisfaction for the promptitude with which it had been performed.

But, since it had been performed most surely not more than seven hours ago, why was it that, though he could still think with keen appreciation of Elmira's beauty, he was yet able to contemplate the certain loss of her almost with equanimity? It was at the worst a wound painful only when it was touched, and Anthony was in no mood for self-discipline; so turned his mind once more to the construction of plans which

should settle for ever the affairs of his family upon a solid basis.

At four in the morning a white and very lovely ghost glided into the dining-room. The ghost carried a lighted candle, and the first thing that she did was to remove the extinct cigar from Anthony's sleeping lips.

"Oh, Tony dear!" she said softly, in gentle expostulation, "you might have set the house on fire."

At the touch of her hand Anthony had come broad awake.

"I thought I had done at least that," he said, taking her in his arms.

"But why do you sit here, out in the cold?" she asked with humour, but avoiding his eyes.

"I'm the chaperon, darling," he answered. "I've been asleep; and no man nor woman can do more than duty."

"You can—you have, my son."

"Mine is to give you all you want, mother," he answered tenderly, "even if you didn't expect it. But I saw the diamond, so don't argue with me."

"How could I?" she asked. "All the same—I didn't expect—not so soon, dear boy. Only in some queer way I felt, when I'd told you, that I had the right to wear it."

She turned from him shyly, setting the Dutch spirit-case, the silver biscuit-box and some glasses upon a brass tray which she took from the sideboard. Anthony watched her.

"You've thrown 'em away, dear," he said.

"What?"

"The years," he explained.

Lady Mary left the tray and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"You're proof to the contrary—to me and to him," she replied.

"I didn't mean you'd wasted them," he cried. "But you've thrown them behind you."

"The terrene revolution of the sun' has done that, Tony," said his mother, with a twinkle of mischief.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed the boy. "How tricky you are to-night! I mean, then, that you have thrown them in front of you—abolished them—will live them again. You're not a day over twenty—and you ought to be in bed."

The smile she gave him in answer was certainly the smile of a girl.

She picked up the tray and went out of the room.

"Let me carry that," he said as he followed.

"Oh, no!" said Lady Mary.

Anthony, following her down the narrow passage to the studio, knew she was victim to the passion of service. To-night even outward signs were important to her, the least egoistic of women.

If jealousy stirred once more in her son's heart before he reached past her laden hands to open the door of the five steps, it was at worst an episode of the serpent's death agony.

Bethune rose and looked up at her carrying the tray down to him. And Anthony paused at the top of the steps, looking down on what he had done.

His plans seemed to have reached their completion while he slept; and it was with means and ends clear in his head that he followed his mother to the table by the sofa.

While Mary filled glasses for her son and his father, no one spoke. Bethune took what she gave him, and drank slowly. Anthony set his upon the table.

"We can't talk about things to-night," he said. "My—my mother must go to bed. Please go on being obedient, dear," he added, embarrassed with the effort it had cost him to give her the new name in the presence of one who seemed still a stranger. "Indeed, I hope you will both do your duty as modern parents—for a few days at least."

He felt his effort at light treatment a failure.

"Look here," he burst out, with a candour boyish in its quality; "I see I've got to speak out now. We're all in the same boat, but we sit in different places. The navigation's difficult; and, though I love to see her," he said to Bethune, "sitting next you, sir, and wish I were as glad to see you near her, I'm a damned egoist, and I keep on thinking my seat is the hardest."

"It is," said Bethune.

"I don't know," replied the boy. "But I feel it—can't help feeling it, you know. So I want you both just to let me take the tiller. If you will, I'll see you through—by the Lord, I will—the best way, too."

"I'm going to do whatever you tell me," said his mother.

Anthony smiled with a kind of affectionate grimness.

"Then please go to bed—now," he said.

"Very well, Tony," she replied; and kissed him. She moved towards the door, laying her hand for a feathery moment on Bethune's arm as she passed him. Foolishly she hoped, for she was a little frightened, that Anthony had not seen this passing caress.

But before she reached the foot of the five steps she was ashamed of her cowardice. The man who had come back was not to be slighted for even Anthony's feelings.

She turned, returned to Bethune, laid a hand on each of his shoulders, and kissed him on the lips. Whereafter she ascended the steps with the dignity of a matron queen, passing Anthony, as he held open the door for her, with a virgin's aversion of countenance.

If he had been his father or a woman, he would have let her go. But he followed her into the passage.

"I'll take him home, dear," he said, "as soon as we can get a cab. I'll look after him. And it's going to be all right."

"It is all right," she answered; and left him.

For the second time since he entered the returning cab, Anthony felt small. And he was too sensible not to know that the feeling was healthy and probably just.

"I haven't had my orders," said Bethune, as his son rejoined him.

Anthony felt a sudden confusion for which he could hardly have accounted.

"Oh, that was only—only—" he began.

"In all seriousness," interrupted Bethune, "it was only right. I have come to consider you lately as something of a genius."

Anthony laughed.

"What form does it take—my genius?" he asked.

"It's the genius of the practical," answered Bethune. "The faculty, very highly developed, of making the best of things. And I'm only too willing to put myself in your hands."

"Why 'too'?" asked the boy, flattered in spite of himself.

"Because I'm afraid," Bethune replied, "that in doing the best for her, you may do better for me than for yourself."

"I'm afraid I don't often forget my own claims," said

Anthony, feeling ashamed. " But if we both keep our eyes on her—if we can come to her with both hands full of happiness for her, sir, the rest won't matter much, will it? "

And so they went out together into the empty streets of the early morning.

CHAPTER III

ELMIRA'S CASTLE

ELMIRA CORDER had nearly made up her mind to follow her inclination by accepting Anthony's offer of marriage. Lord Ingestow she had not seen for several days; and, until the Friday night of the week wherein so much occurred to alter Anthony's position, nothing happened to bring her inclination to loggerheads with her judgment.

On that Friday evening, however, she went to a theatre with Harriet and others. The play was followed by supper at a restaurant fashionable enough to send Elmira home in good temper. Lying on the hall table was a letter from Anthony—the letter which he had written in Lady Mary's boudoir some eight or nine hours before. With a hurried good-night to her sister-in-law, she escaped to her room.

Her mood was of happiness unusual. The play, which she had derided for the simplicity of its theme, had perhaps secretly touched her. The glass and a half of champagne with the oysters had, also perhaps, kept alive and heightened the gentle impression; and a love-letter for herself, from the most charming of the many men she believed she had charmed, brought the final glow to a mood of delightful satisfaction with herself.

" 'All's right with the world,' " she quoted cheerfully, and resolved to have her bath and do her hair before opening the letter.

Fresh, radiant, full of comfort physical and moral, she settled herself at last between the sheets to the luxurious reading of what Anthony had written.

"MY DEAR MISS CORDER,

"Only one half of your week is gone. But it is not because it has been longer than any month in my experience that I am breaking through the silence of it with a letter. It is to tell you a thing which you ought to know—a thing which I myself have only learned within the hour in which I write to tell you of it.

"I am not the son of the late Colonel Le Dane, nor of the late Lady Blanche Le Dane; nor do I know with what name I should

sign this letter. Perhaps I ought to be more explicit. My father and mother were not husband and wife when I was born.

"By this painful discovery my admiration for you and my desire to marry you of course are unaffected. But I expect dismissal, even as I shall respect it, at your hands."

This letter, which bore his Christian name alone for signature, struck Elmira, in her present mood, with a note of pathos. She felt really sorry for the breaking of her slender dream—and what pity she had over from herself she let fall upon Anthony. She had always felt sorry for the men who had to lose her, and she felt sorrier for Anthony than for any of the others. Then a little glow came back to her from the pretty footlight sentiment of the evening; and it crossed her mind that she too might be capable of generous action based on graceful sentiment. It was at least nice to think of it. And thinking of it, since she was excited out of immediate desire to sleep, led her to the building of a very pretty Castle in Spain; the edifice at last pleasing her so well that she got out of bed and wrote to her poor Anthony just such a reply to his letter as might have been written by the young woman in the play, at whose rather syrupy sentiment she had mocked.

She slipped the written letter into an envelope, which she neither sealed nor addressed, dropped it into a drawer of the writing-table, and, in spite of a small voice which kept telling her "written" was not "posted," fell asleep in sweet satisfaction with her own goodness of heart.

Till she had eaten her breakfast, the glow remained with her. But afterwards she went to the little library behind Harriet's drawing-room to write letters. She had carried her last night's epistle, still unaddressed, from bedroom to breakfast-table, and now flung it with a sort of pitying reluctance upon the writing-desk.

Three notes she wrote, and then her mind came back once more to the envelope that had no writing upon it.

There it lay, blank, while the romance of last night, no less than the definitely optimistic fairy-tales of childhood, no less than the rambling and amorous domesticity of the reading approved for her girlhood, cried aloud for address, stamp, and pillar-box.

Some thoughts of another kind, moreover, came to support all this romantic doctrine, and with this help, for a brief half-hour, the gospel of the fairies triumphed.

The letter should go, and she would get the man she was

sure she loved, and other things, perhaps, would be added to her. Surely her generous action could not fail to secure the admiring friendship of this old aristocratic family which, while it admitted the *smart*, neither loved nor belonged to that vast clique of egregious performance. What if her connection with such a family were left-handed? She knew Lord Ingestow, she had met his sister; and she was convinced that by these two at least the irregular channel of his blood would not be counted for unrighteousness to Anthony and to Anthony's wife. Why, even Lady Mary Frozier, whom Elmira did not like—who, Elmira made no doubt, disapproved altogether of Elmira—Lady Mary, she felt sure, would make much of the woman who should tell her nephew how much greater in her eyes was the *Anthony* than the *Frozier* or the *Le Dane*.

She read the letter again, and saw that it gave her no ground for assuming that he had even irregular relation with the Froziers.

But then there was Lady Mary's devotion to him—a thing obvious, and to be relied upon, Elmira believed, whatever its origin.

"I do wish," she said to herself, "that the dear boy had told me who he is. It's much more interesting than who he isn't."

And then she remembered how and why she had tempted him to shave his moustache. She wondered whether he had done it. Very strange thoughts began to race through her head after this. They would neither fit properly with each other nor consent to banishment.

"The great thing is," she concluded, "to do whatever I do now—while it is quite impossible that I should know anything."

And then Anthony was to achieve a greatness of his own; and she would have given herself and won him before the greatness was shown to the world.

"Somehow or other he's bound to be somebody," she thought. "And he's the person I like best."

She rang the bell, meaning to send the letter out to the post at once. But the maid, who entered before she had dipped her pen to address it, came, not to her summons, but to tell her that Lord Ingestow was in the drawing-room, and wished to see Miss Corder.

Elmira's face, even to the lips, went white. The parlour-

maid, seeing the pallor, made sure that this Bayswater house of her bondage was on the brink of a thrilling romance with an earl and orange-blossoms in it—with motor-cars, and everything in the latest fashion. And her belief was strengthened when Elmira told her that she would see his lordship here in the library.

When Ingestow came in, her colour was returning in a flush very becoming. The blush was very pretty to look at, and had the immediate effect of adding weight to his feeling that the hour of his call needed explaining. One explanation there was, of course, which would be accepted, with or without the explainer. But he did not mean to plunge at once—was perhaps not quite decided to plunge at all—and so fell back upon the contents of an envelope which he drew from his pocket as soon as he had wished her good-morning. On the outside this envelope bore hyperbolic praises of a cheap whisky; inside, stall tickets to witness the performance of an expensive French comedian.

"I heard Mrs Corder say she'd never seen him," he said; "and you that you had. So you must both want most awfully to go. I had the luck to get four stalls—and it is luck, you know, the way they're running after him. And I thought it'd be awfully good of you and your sister-in-law if you'd let me go with you."

"You are always so kind, Lord Ingestow," answered Elmira, drawing the thin white cards from the shameless envelope to look at the date. "The twenty-seventh—why, that's Monday. Of course we can use them—and you," she added, with a very charming smile. "But there are four?"

"There's a Mr Corder, isn't there?" asked Ingestow, with a slight awkwardness which put Elmira at last fully at her ease. For was it not plain that he was theoretically embracing her cumbrous family? They could accept the embrace without including Sigismund further than spiritually. In the flesh Sigismund might be capable of urging his own cigars.

"Oh, yes," she replied, smiling again, "—if he can come."

"And the fourth is for me. I think I'd better keep it," said Ingestow.

"Won't you keep them all, and dine with us before the play?"

"I can't—not on Monday. But I want to keep mine—the

outside seat of the four, you know. And I want you to promise me that you will sit in the next," said Ingestow. "Then I shall have you all to myself. And you can tell me what it all means."

It was an arrangement to which Elmira found no objection.

Ingestow watched her with growing pleasure and decreasing caution, as she picked out the ticket he had chosen for himself, put the remaining three back into the theatre wrapper and laid it in a drawer of the writing-table; took from another drawer an envelope of the sort she always used; slipped into it the single ticket, and handed it to the man who wished to talk with her and with her alone all through the French play which he pretended he would not understand without her help.

Now in doing these things her every movement was so delicate and yet so firmly decided; her beautiful hands so white, graceful and pink-tipped; the perfect gravity of her exquisite face was so serene, in spite of something in its expression which he would have described as restrained expectancy; the little smile with which she handed him the envelope, moreover, though for the moment it certainly lit up her face, did nevertheless so little to relieve its solemnity, that Ingestow threw away his last scruple and plunged.

"But after all," he began, "it's very likely you won't want to go when Monday comes—not with me."

"Why not?" asked Elmira, the gravity even sweeter in her voice than in her face.

"Because I can't wait till Monday evening, you see," he replied, "to say what I came to say this morning."

"Why should you?"

"Then I won't," said Ingestow, with a short laugh. "It was only that I didn't want to spoil Monday. I want you to marry me, Miss Corder."

Though she had known very well it was coming—had intended, indeed, that come it should—Elmira paled once more—at the very moment when the records prescribe blushes. She rose from her chair by the writing-table, and went to the window looking out on Harriet's little garden, gay with flowers.

Ingestow rose too. The danger of opposition gave him the instinctive feeling that he needed both hands free; and, as he took a few steps towards the girl retreating from him, he dropped the envelope containing the theatre ticket upon the writing-table.

But the immobility of the shapely back turned towards him checked his approach.

"I do hope you aren't going to say no," he exclaimed, surprised to find how much he desired her, now that there was doubt of her answer. "Because I admire you more than any other woman I know. I can't tell you how proud I should be of you—if you would. And I'd—I'd play the game, you know—honestly, I would. I don't believe you'd ever be sorry you trusted me."

While she gazed out on that small oblong plot of grass, the last stones of her airy castle were melting into the air of which they had been fashioned. The colour was coming back to her cheeks, as she turned to face facts and the prospect of houses more solidly built.

"I think," she said, holding out to him a surrendering hand, "—I don't think what you have said need spoil Monday evening."

When, half an hour later, Ingestow was leaving her, Elmira asked him if he had his ticket for Monday night.

"I'm not likely to forget that," he answered, waving before her eyes the envelope he had taken from the writing-table. "Not that it matters much, now, though."

And he put the envelope in his pocket.

"Why not?" asked Elmira.

"Because I hope we shall go together," said Ingestow. "Long before Monday I shall be here to see your brother; and then, if he'll ask me to dinner, I shall jump at it. But perhaps," he added, "he'll be too angry."

"He won't be angry—Harriet wouldn't let him, even if he were inclined that way," she answered, laughing. "She's become quite American in the use of her privileges, while he quite fancies himself English in the use of his power."

"Happy people!" said Ingestow, from the doorway. "D'you think we shall hit it off as well?"

"I'm sure you'll never be anything but English," said Elmira, with a mock meekness which he found very charming. "The first time I saw you I said I'd be sorry for your wife. So I'll just have to make up my mind to be quite English too."

When he was gone, her first feeling was of triumph over Harriet. But her eye fell upon the envelope which she believed she had left lying on the table; and even as she picked it up on her way to her bedroom there came a sudden clouding

of her satisfaction. She knew why Harriet would be glad; not for Elmira's capture of a title; not for her own and her household's release from Elmira; but, in the first place at least, for the escape of Anthony Le Dane.

Even while she wished that she could show to Harriet the letter she had written to him last night, Elmira was clutching the envelope tighter in the vaguely imagined danger of Harriet's seeing what she had written before she had done what she had done.

When she reached her bedroom, for a moment she hesitated. Though not yet four and twenty, Elmira distrusted the written word, into fragments however small its vehicle might be rent. It was summer, and the house had no fire outside the kitchen. She would burn it here with matches upon the hearthstone. But there was the luncheon bell—and the burning would do better at night, when there should be time to crumble and scatter the black cinders of it out of window. So she tidied her unruffled person for lunch and Harriet, timing herself accurately for her regular two minutes late.

So bright a radiance did she bring with her to Harriet, the children and the leathery omelette which supported the weekly fricassee of Fridays, that her sister-in-law could find nothing to ease her temper upon. This temper was generally good; but even Harriet Corder must have her days. A "phenomenal sale" had claimed the early part of this, and it was her 'bus-borne fear of even two minutes' lateness which made her eat her luncheon without removing her hat; and made her also wish wickedly that somebody would give her excuse for that relief which the tongue only can give. Yet her good heart was well pleased that Elmira gave her none. For she would be sure to take it, and Sigismund would be worried—and, worse than being worried, would talk, in a bluff, horrid way which was less English than he thought it, of women.

Elmira beamed upon her, while Harriet's hat nodded in her struggle with the fricassee's twice-cooked chicken.

"Yes?" said Harriet, as soon as she could respond.

"Lord Ingestow called."

"I'm sorry I was out. It was rather an odd time to come."

"He brought seats for the French plays—Monday night," said Elmira. "It didn't matter, your being out. He wanted me."

"What for?" asked Harriet, speaking somewhat brusquely.

"To marry," said Elmira serenely.

When the children were gone, Harriet's congratulations reached high-water mark in kisses.

And for the first time Elmira hated her brother's wife. For she knew why she had been kissed.

The burning of the envelope which had not been addressed was accomplished not without pain. Burnt or not, however, was little matter; for a second letter had been written to Anthony, and posted. Alone in her room that midnight, which, late in the year though it was for fires, was cold as well as damp, Elmira set light to the housemaid's hash of sticks and paper. By some wonderful turn of luck, the whole grateful took fire. She waited till the coals glowed; then flung her envelope into the heart of them, after resisting a foolish temptation to read once more the words she had written—the words that she did not know were not, nor had ever been, inside that envelope.

Even after the air-castle has fallen, the powdery dust of its ill-made bricks will tickle our nostrils.

Elmira turned away to her toilette for the night. She did not wish to see the burning of the best letter she had ever written.

CHAPTER IV

FORSBERG'S TEXT

THE Saturday upon which Miss Elmira Corder accepted Lord Ingestow's offer of marriage was for the man she had refused a very busy day. He had slept a bare three hours when he was roused by Axel Forsberg and Mr Schomberg Delorme, for the transaction of urgent affairs. When Delorme had been reduced to a seething silence, and Forsberg had explained to Anthony the need of his concurrence and signature, Anthony experienced a faint feeling of surprise that men should be troubled over such trifles as injunctions and infringements of patent.

Delorme, satisfied that all would now be done as he wished, and confident of the legality as well as the equity of his own and his backers' position, rushed off to Hackney and his workshop.

Anthony sat in his pyjamas, irritably smoking a cigarette, and writing his name wherever Forsberg told him to write it. As the outside door closed on the vanished inventor, Anthony laughed.

"Yes?" said Forsberg.

"I laughed at myself," explained Anthony. "What a damned thing a cigarette before breakfast is!" he added parenthetically, throwing three quarters of his third into the empty fireplace. "I had been wondering, you see, why a man should worry so much about these things. Which shows, doesn't it? that I'm off colour—out of touch with all that was first with me yesterday."

"That's what I thought," agreed Forsberg. "Why did you laugh, any way?"

"Because, when that lunatic slammed the outside door, it struck me that it was just what I was worrying about myself."

"What?" asked his friend, with anxiety not very well concealed.

Anthony looked up at his friend with a grim smile.

"When I was invented," he said, "they forgot to patent me."

And Forsberg could not help knowing what he meant.

"Oh, well," he replied, speaking with a kind of serious lightness, "I've known many a *secret* that proved worth a dozen patents."

"That's it," cried Anthony. "I've been a secret ever since I was invented. I'm coming out now—bound to come out—or I wouldn't tell you about it. Although, in a way, it's all your fault, Forsberg," said Anthony, "I wouldn't tell even you, if it weren't that things are going to happen so that you couldn't help seeing it all for yourself."

"It is my fault," Forsberg admitted. "But I guess you know that at first I was only struck with a likeness so remarkable that I wanted to see the pair of you side by side. I wasn't plotting anything."

"I know that," answered Anthony.

"Will you tell me something?" asked Forsberg, speaking, for once at least in his life, with diffidence.

"Tell you anything you like," replied Anthony; "because, as I said, you're bound to know it all, even if we tried to hide things."

"Who told you?"

"My mother," said Anthony.

Forsberg was puzzled; for he had not even guessed at the second half of the enigma presented to him by the likeness of Randolph Bethune and Anthony Le Dane.

"I thought you told me," he said, "that Lady Blanche Le Dane was dead."

And then Anthony flushed crimson; he had told his friend that he was to know everything, and found himself confronted with the necessity of telling the hardest part—which he had somehow imagined that Forsberg already knew. In justice to the son it must be admitted that he had got over the statement of his baseness of birth with an effort very slight compared with that which it cost him to declare that the mother of whom his heart was so proud was neither wife nor maid. He was, however, already on the edge of speech, when Forsberg interrupted him.

"Don't tell me anything you'd rather keep to yourself," he said.

"I'd like to keep it all to myself—to ourselves," Anthony answered. "I'd like to hide our three heads from everything and everybody. But, even if that were possible, which it isn't, the price would be too great. As you'll have to know—as

you've found out one half, or almost, on your own, you'd better know the rest from me. My mother is Lady Mary Frozier."

Axel Forsberg stretched himself to his full height, throwing back his head and flinging out his arms. And then he laughed.

"What's that for?" asked Anthony, sore and suspicious.

"By the God that made me," cried the giant, "you're a man in luck. Have you forgotten that the old fellows used to laugh when they were happy? I laughed because I have a rudimentary conscience, and you've taken a weight off it." And he sat down with a sigh of unaffected relief.

Anthony heard him, and understood him. But there was still something which restrained the honest expression of his joy in the mother his father had given him. Before that three hours' sleep he had felt himself entering upon a better way. But since they had wrenched him from insufficient slumber, something had gone sour in him.

"If I've helped to bring things to light by my senseless curiosity," continued his friend, "I'm mighty well pleased to find you're no loser. To begin with, there was no—no—"

"Oh, yes, that's true enough," interrupted Anthony. "Of course it would be worse if there had been anybody deceived—broken vows, or any other vileness. But I'm so made, Axel, that the 'how much worse it might have been' argument doesn't appeal to me. I find it bad enough."

Forsberg looked at his friend with anxiety. Lack of sleep, need of bath and breakfast, with unaccustomed cigarettes before them, might account for some ill temper. But there was more than occasional disturbance here, he thought; so he postponed the saying of the things that were in his mind and near his tongue.

Anthony took a fresh cigarette from the box on the table. Forsberg filched it from his hand and threw it back into the box; rose from his seat and rang the bell.

"Go and wallow in water," he said; "and when you're clean and decent, and outside a good breakfast, I'll have something to say to you."

The mere sympathy of the man's presence, and the assurance that he would not be left alone till his breakfast was eaten made Anthony obedient. While he was out of the room, his friend interviewed the servant, and a remarkable meal was the result.

Shinniver at least, when he was recovered from the hurried

marketing and anxious cooking of it, thought it without precedent; but Shinniver had never been in America.

When Anthony, dressed, cool, and at least ready to smile, sauntered again into the parlour, he found Forsberg fidgetting with the coffee-pot.

"Oh, get a move on you," he cried. "The coffee's just right. I'm doing this feed, though you pay for it. You English don't know what breakfast is. Sit."

And when he had eaten all he could, and three times as much as he was used to eat at this time of day, Anthony felt as if he had got back at least three of the lost hours of his sleep.

"And now," said Forsberg, "you may smoke all you want. You must smoke, in fact."

"Why?" asked Anthony, smoking already and feeling more tolerant than he had expected ever to feel again.

"Because I'm going to preach," said Forsberg.

"One doesn't smoke in church," objected Anthony, comfortably.

"This one does not—that's a fact," replied Forsberg. "But he'd go to church once or twice in a year, maybe, if he had that protection against the unanswerable pulpit."

"What's your text?" asked Anthony.

"Love," said Forsberg, boldly.

Anthony looked at him in wonder.

"You've swapped two mythical respectabilities for the finest man in England and the sweetest woman out of Heaven. You've traded society's hall-mark for a real mother, a real father and real love," said Forsberg, blurting out his words as if he were afraid that death would overtake him before they were uttered.

"I had her love already," objected Anthony, more to test his friend's reasoning than in defence of his recent mood.

"My dear boy," replied Forsberg solemnly, "you ought to know better than talk that way. If your love for that lovely woman—you'll pardon my venturing to describe her to you—if your love for Lady Mary didn't swell and grow and blossom out of all knowledge when you learned that you came from her heart and her body, I don't know you."

"It's I that don't know you to-day, old man," cried Anthony. "Go on."

"You want to know why I care—what makes me break through your privacy as well as my own reserve, to talk of

things we most always keep the lid on? Well," said Forsberg, his face very pale and his eyes glowing, "I reckon I'm going to tell you why. But I'd like to have you observe that I've avoided the line of argument you objected to—that I have so far only compared your own last state with your first—and I defy you to deny that the last is the more gracious."

"I don't deny it any longer, Axel," said the boy, almost forgetting his own trouble in the suffering which he was sure lay behind his friend's eloquence.

Forsberg laughed once more—bitterly, Anthony thought.

"I once pulled a girl out of a river—at a picnic," he said; "it was a very close call she had. When she came round, she cried—because her hat was spoiled." Then, after a moment's hesitation, "After all," he continued, "you've got to listen to the 'how much worse it might have been' argument—so's I can show you how your long face has stirred up all my dormant sentiment. Well, my parents were married, right enough. My home was highly respected. No one pointed the finger. No man nor woman, as far as I know, came between my father and mother."

"Well?" said Anthony.

"But I did—I and my brothers," said Forsberg fiercely. "We came between the hammer of insult and the anvil of hate. Oh, there was school and church, clothes and food enough—in hell. How that kind of thing can be, you won't understand, my boy. But it was. And it drove the two elder ones into the wider hell that waits for such as we were—outside. You are sprung from love, you have been bred up by purity and constancy, and now you're coming into your kingdom. I spring from pain, selfishness and malice; I was raised in an atmosphere of festering hatred, and I spend my idle minutes trying to avoid the memory of—of those two. Now, tell me which is the bastard—you or I?"

"Perhaps they loved you in the beginning," suggested Anthony, weakly.

Forsberg laughed again.

"I was the youngest," he said. Then he rose, stretched himself once more, dipped his hand in the cigar-box, and added:

"So that's why I turned preacher.

"I guess," he went on, when his cigar was alight, "that the world, way back in the beginnings of things, got a notion of the holiness there is in the human trinity—the trinity of

father, mother and child—the three persons and the one love. And so the world set up that ideal and terrible sanctuary of marriage for its god to live in. And I don't deny it established a fine institution—I don't doubt it works out the highest average. But when that kind of church-building gets to be a meeting-house for the seven devils, it knocks the stuffing out of Tam o' Shanter's Saturday Night."

"How do you come to know so much—I mean, about the side of it you missed?" asked Anthony.

"Watching the other kind," replied his friend. "I'm not the sort that thinks no horse can run because he's put his stamps on a wrong un."

"I'm like the child who wants to know 'what happened next', when the story's done," said Anthony. "Your mother and father—?"

"The story's over—long ago—thank God. Different compartments, I hope."

"Then you did care?"

"Oh, there were moments," admitted Forsberg, "—moments necessary to complete horror."

"I retract what I said about the comparative method," Anthony remarked a few minutes later. "It does appeal, when—when one cares about the man who had the 'how much worse'."

Forsberg smiled at him solemnly.

"You remind me," he said, "that I hadn't quite finished. There's something about you that gives me an unreasonable sense of a right to have a finger in your pie. But if you don't give every ounce of your horse-power—every cent you're worth in the sky-blue currency—towards making those two people forget the wrong they've done, I shall have another lesson in not backing my fancy. You owe him to her, and her to him, however it was. And you owe yourself, and the best of yourself, to the pair of them."

"I agree with everything you say. Most of it, indeed, I had thought already—" Anthony began.

"Thought!" interrupted Forsberg. "You've got to feel it with all your heart, and do it with all your strength—no grudge—no looking back—no damned gradations of cold shoulder."

Anthony rose and rang the bell. Then he took off his flannel blazer. When his man entered,

"My coat, please—no, not a frock," he said. "The new

morning coat. Grey gloves. And just see which hat is in the best condition, Shinniver."

When he was ready, after taking what Forsberg thought almost feminine pains with his appearance, Anthony asked his friend to walk with him. They went down Shaftesbury Avenue together.

"I want you to come out to Cheyne Walk to-morrow morning," said Anthony. "Can you be there by nine?"

Forsberg nodded assent. As they turned into Coventry Street,

"I wonder where you're off to now," he remarked. "You've got yourself up so bright and shiny, I'd think it was a woman, if you weren't taking the wrong direction—for your sort."

"I'm going to see my father," said Anthony. The word was uttered with a difficulty which Forsberg put down to shyness, rather than to the mood in which he had found his friend before breakfast.

"In justice to myself," Anthony went on, "I want to tell you that I fetched him to Cheyne Walk last night. I took him back to the hotel about four this morning."

They had reached *The Empire*, and Forsberg crossed the road, into the garden of the square, and sat upon an empty bench. Anthony took a seat beside him.

"I'm going to say good-bye. I'm busy enough, Lord knows, and you'll do better alone now."

Forsberg paused a moment, and Anthony waited.

"There was a man over there," he resumed, "out West. It was before my day. He was running for the biggest office the world has to offer. We have fits sometimes of a kind of vicarious morality. I think you call it Nonconformist Conscience, this side. The man's enemies found a woman and a child. They said the child was his, and that the woman had been, or was. They said it very loud indeed. And the wire-pullers of his party came to him and begged the man to give them his answer—his denial—his refutation. 'You must tell them something,' they cried, in terror of defeat. 'What shall we say?'

" 'Tell 'em it's true,' he growled.

"I don't know whether the tale is," added Forsberg, "but I thought it a good one when they told it to me. At nine to-morrow, then. So long."

Fifteen minutes later Anthony was shown into Bethune's bedroom, and found him dressing.

Behind the haggardness of his face, which seemed this morning more worn than usual, there shone a light which Anthony had not seen before.

The world was worth while again.

Bethune wished his visitor good-morning very pleasantly; using, as Anthony heard with compunction, no name in addressing him. As he spoke, moreover, he laid down his hair brushes, but, instead of extending his hand, took up his waistcoat, and began to put it on. Whether there had been a change of purpose Anthony could not tell. But in policy he assumed it.

"You were going to shake hands, sir," he exclaimed reproachfully.

Bethune made not even a sign of response.

"Why didn't you?" asked Anthony.

"I think," said Bethune with a smile, as he buttoned his waistcoat, "as your friend Forsberg might say, it's up to you."

And it was not only the phrase, but much more the thought, which was like Forsberg. "If you don't smooth the road for them—if you do not give them your heart with both hands," Axel had said in effect, "you are unworthy of my friendship."

Anthony's right hand shot out with a gesture very large and expressive for a young man of his national as well as inculcated reserve. His father's met it, and there was silence till the hands parted.

"I know that—sir," said Anthony. He tried to say another word than *sir*, but it would not come—though he felt it nearer the lips than he could have believed two hours ago. "I know it's up to me—just because you two wonderful people think it is. And that's why I have the—the damned cheek to take so much upon me."

Bethune smiled the strangest smile, his son thought, that he had ever seen.

"Anthony," he said—and he said the name almost with a gasp, feeling that never in his life before had he taken such a liberty—"I am a sinner—a very bad sinner. I've repented longer than you've been in the world, and now, when I see you—now, when I ought, perhaps, to repent most of all, I can't do it. I've forgotten what it feels like, almost. I could apologise to you willingly enough; but real penitence,

you see, should be ready to apologise you out of existence. And, if it were the price of salvation, I couldn't do it."

Anthony was touched, more even than the genuine compliment of both words and voice could affect him, by the similarity of the thought to some reflections of his own remembered from last night, and present to him ever since as a kind of atmosphere surrounding the whole entanglement. He laughed, therefore, as he answered. And the quality of the laughter fell pleasantly upon Bethune's ears.

"That's just the shape some of my thinking took yesterday, sir," he said simply. "I—I want to tell you that I am awfully proud of being your son—really I am. Only, the way it came out, and the way of thinking one's been brought up in, you know—"

"I know," said his father, adroitly interrupting his difficulty, "that it must have been an awful facer, and that the way you take it increases my respect for you. I wish to God," he added, "that my fault had not to be visited on you."

"I said something to my mother—something that was quite true—yesterday, before I came here, sir, that seemed to comfort her."

"What was it?" asked Bethune.

Anthony shook his head.

"I can't say it now," he explained. "She'll tell you. But I wouldn't mind betting that I shall be honestly saying as much to you before long. Meantime—well, we've been friends for some weeks—rather good friends for men so different in age. Can't we go on with our friendship—go on adding to it, and working together for our common object? That way, I think, we may pick up the lost years."

"It's a deal," said Bethune. "And now—what is it you want me to do?"

Then Anthony told him.

CHAPTER V

THE TWO ANTHONYS

IT was not until late in the afternoon that Anthony was able to leave Bethune once more at his hotel. The hansom which took him thence to his mother's house seemed drawn by a very slug among horses, though his watch would have told him that seventeen minutes was its time from door to door. But when he had let himself in, he found two things unexpected. On the hall table was a letter for him; and on a table in the little library sat Ingestow, waiting, as he irritably explained, to see his sister.

"Little nephew," he said, "why don't you keep Auntie at home?"

"I don't live here," replied Anthony.

"I thought you did. At least, I never thought at all. It seemed natural. She's much more like your mother, you know, than your aunt. Good Gad!" cried Lord Ingestow, "I wish she'd come. I'm bursting with news, man."

Against the grain, for he wished his youthful uncle anywhere but where he was, Anthony soothed Ingestow with hope.

"How d'you know she won't be long—tell me that, O only Anthony! She might be shopping."

"I think she's expecting me," said Anthony.

"You're hardly a man—because you're only a nephew," grumbled the uncle. "But you're evidently more than a brother. Oh, do read your letter."

"Thanks," replied Anthony; and read it.

From this house and on his mother's paper Anthony had written to Elmira. And to this house she had sent her reply. The letter that he read while Ingestow sat on the table, swinging his legs and smoking, was the letter she had written that very morning after Ingestow had left her.

"MY DEAR MR LE DANE," she wrote,

"Your letter has made me very sad for you as well as for myself. For you, on account of the pain which this discovery must give you. For myself, because I shall never be able to prove to you that the

refusal, which I am obliged so ungratefully to give to your offer, was determined upon before I received your letter. If it had been you, it would have been you, no matter what your name or the circumstances of your birth. This is a thing which I ask you to believe. But I am a little afraid that you will not believe it.

"Lord Ingestow has asked me to marry him, and I have said that I will."

As he read the last words, disbelieving as she had suggested he would disbelieve, and yet on account of her very frankness, hating himself for his unbelief, they heard the click of Lady Mary's latch-key. Ingestow spoke, and she heard his voice. She entered the library and greeted her brother in tones and with a lightness of manner which astonished her son, even while he understood.

"What's the matter with you, sister Mary?" asked Ingestow, puzzled. "You look twenty years younger, and as if you'd found the answer to a great riddle, and were afraid somebody would guess you knew and make you tell."

An expression so imaginative from the matter-of-fact Ingestow made Anthony look up from his letter, which he was reading for the second time. When he saw in Lady Mary's face what had loosened her brother's tongue, his own wrongs dwindled to sudden insignificance. Not now could Harriet Corder have said that the soul dwelt a long way off behind the face. Whether for the youthful appearance or the possession of a secret which he had ascribed to her, she blushed at Ingestow's words—blushed hotly and suddenly, like a girl.

"Do I look young?" she asked, crossing the room swiftly towards a mirror—as much, perhaps, to hide her face from her brother as to get sight of it herself.

Before she reached the glass, she saw Anthony, standing in the window. He had returned Elmira's letter to its envelope, and was slipping it into his pocket. The sight of him cooled her cheeks very effectually. For in his face the signs of such emotion as the pocketed letter had produced in him were still apparent, though the pain of it had begun to fade at the sight of his mother's happy bearing.

"Oh, Tony!" she cried. "What's the matter?"

"Only a letter—a nasty sort of letter, you know," he answered, as lightly and truthfully as he could. "It's nothing—three letters out of five are nasty, aren't they?"

"Is it money, dear?" she asked, breathlessly anxious; she had forgotten the presence of her brother.

Anthony laughed.

"As if I'd let money worry me," he answered heartily, "when there's you and your cheque-book! If that ran dry, I'd just ask you to paint me a picture, and get a thousand, less a wicked commission, out of the wickedest dealer in London."

"Why wicked, dear?" she asked, watching his face and hardly heeding her own words.

"Because you've reached the place," he answered, "where the dishonest are the quickest to deal. They know the length of their chance of doing business."

"If it's not money, Tony," she said, "it must be a woman makes you look like that."

"What else should it be?" said Anthony with a smile which she felt was crooked. "You might as well try to get away from the atmosphere."

Ingestow listened politely and wondered intrusively. As to what woman was in question, if any there were, he was too little interested to reflect that it might be the woman he thought his. For there was something arresting to-day about his sister in whatever she did or said—not to speak of her appearance. He had seen her before with Anthony Le Dane, upon occasions as well remembered as infrequent. And to-day, he was sure, her manner was different. Why, she seemed, in the intensity of her anxiety, to have forgotten that she was not alone with its object.

She had looked at the boy as if—and then he remembered his light word to his nephew, ten minutes ago, when he had said that she was more like his mother than his aunt.

"Tailor's bill," he said. "You may take it from me, Mary, that's about the worst of it. Aren't you going to give me tea, when I've come all this way to get it?"

"Of course. It'll be ready now, in the studio," she said. And there was a pinching of her brows, and a hurried glance at Anthony, which Ingestow not only saw, but knew that three days ago she would have known he could not help seeing.

So he went first from the room.

"I'm going ahead, to see if you were speaking the truth," he called back. "Get that tailor, or dressmaker, off your chest, son of my sister." And so left them, a little puzzled, more amused, but most of all determined to tell Mary of the good fortune he had in the woman that was to marry him.

Lady Mary turned to her son.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Ingestow wants to talk to you," replied Anthony. "I think he's going to tell me the same news as my letter has told me."

"May I read it?" she asked boldly.

"No," he answered. "It wouldn't be fair. You don't like her."

"You wrote to her yesterday, Tony?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"And you—you told her?"

"About myself—nothing about anybody else," replied Anthony. "I had to tell her, because I'd asked her to marry me. She was taking a week," he added, with the thinnest ghost of a smile, "to make up her mind."

"And now she refuses?"

"Yes."

"Because of that?"

"She gives a different reason," Anthony replied. "It's a good reason. If you'll talk to Ingestow now, he'll go all the sooner. And I want to see you alone."

"Very well, dear," said Lady Mary; and had reached the door when a thought struck her which made her close it without passing out of the room. And as she came back to him, Anthony saw that some of the years she seemed to have discarded had returned to her face.

"If you have told her," she said, white and breathing quickly, "I ought to tell him."

"I told her nothing about you," he answered.

"Just now, as he was leaving us," said Lady Mary, "he looked as if he were on the point of guessing it himself."

"How could he?" exclaimed Anthony. "It's absurd."

"He was near enough to it, I am sure, to know who is your mother directly he learns that Blanche was not," persisted Lady Mary—"I won't have him taken at a disadvantage by that—by anybody."

The poor woman was trembling violently, caught between pride and shame.

"Yes, I will," she declared. "Perhaps he won't hate me quite so much if I tell him myself."

Anthony put his arm round her and kissed her.

"Ingestow's a good man," he said as he opened the door for her. "And you are a brave woman."

He flung himself into a long chair, and for half an hour

tried to read, tried to enjoy his tobacco, and tried not to think. His three-fold failure was interrupted at last by Lord Ingestow. With a very long face he came into the library, closing the door behind him with caution suggestive of the sick room.

He crossed the floor to his nephew, who looked up at him with a curiosity wherein the humour balanced the defiance.

"By God, Tony," said the uncle, "but your mother's a fine woman! In one way this is all the very damndest kind of luck for you, I know. But when I think of the time I've just spent with her down there where she paints—and I'm going to think of it every Sunday all my life, instead of going to church—when I think of it, I feel something I don't understand."

Ingestow paused, hunting for expression. From the first his listener was touched. Coming straight from his mother, her brother had called him by the name which none but his mother used.

"It's awful rot, you know," Ingestow continued, "that I can't say what I mean. But I'm so swelled somewhere—not in the head—when I remember the woman's my sister, that it just beats me to try and guess what you must be feeling."

So much to Anthony's taste were these halting expressions that he made a remark intentionally foolish.

"What's she done," he asked, "to make you talk like that?"

"Done, you silly fool?" exclaimed his lordship, "—for the very silliest kind of fool you'd certainly be, if you said a thing like that for any other reason than to make me go on—Done? It's what she *is*—the shape of her soul, or something. One side of me wants to cut Thibet Bethune's throat, while the other side—the side that's inside—says that her love makes a—a—what do the Roman Catholic people call it?"

"Sacrament?" suggested Anthony.

"That's it. Makes a sacrament without any label being necessary. I daresay I'm talking the steepest rot—"

"It sounds sense to me," said Anthony. "But I'm prejudiced. Go on."

"So I've made up my mind I must take him on faith. What Mary loves must be worth the benefit of the doubt, you know."

"He's worth that and more," said Anthony.

And Ingestow's good sense was quickened by his sympathy

to perceive the good he might do his sister by forcing his nephew into defence of his father.

"I hope you're right," he said grimly. "For Bethune's sake, I mean."

"Eh?" said Anthony, peering at him through the narrow slits of eyelids half closed, aggressively critical.

"Oh, I'm not forgetting what he is to you," replied Ingestow to this challenge. "I'm only telling you what I'll be to him, if he isn't what I like to Mary."

"There's so much assumption in your remarks," said Anthony, "and the assumption is so well justified, that I will ask you to come here to-morrow morning."

"Of course I will," said Ingestow. "What time?"

"Nine," replied Anthony. "If there's any change in the time, I'll let you know to-night, somehow."

"Nine o'clock!" cried the other. "All right." And then he added: "For a wonder I'm dining at home to-night."

"What's your telephone number?" asked Anthony.

"It's the only one in London I can't remember," said Ingestow. "I'm never there." And he drew from his breast pocket a thin and gorgeous letter-case. "I've got it somewhere."

And through the searching fingers an envelope, which had been enclosed though not pocketed in the case, fell to the table by which Ingestow had seated himself. And even as it fell Anthony recognised the paper, the size, and the device upon the flap. He had reason, with one like it, and that not his first, still burning in his pocket.

"There! I knew I had it—it's the first figure beats me always," said Ingestow; and handed his nephew a scrap of thin paper bearing a type-written number. Anthony took it, while the other shut his case, and would have returned it to his pocket.

"You've dropped a letter," said Anthony, sitting very still.

"Have I? Well, anyhow, it hasn't any address," answered Ingestow, picking it up and turning it over.

Had his thoughts not been on serious things, he would have remembered readily enough what it contained—or should have contained. Feeling, however, as he was, for some last word to say to a man suffering under what, for all its spiritual compensation, could not be called anything but a worldly disaster, he drew from the envelope with mechanical fingers, not a theatre-ticket, but a sheet of very delicate note-paper.

"This is something I've got hold of by mistake," he said, "or something I ought to have read. Will you excuse me?"

Opened, the sheet showed him his own Christian name.

"My dear Anthony," the letter began. Ingestow turned the leaf, and saw the bold signature "Elmira"; excused himself to Anthony and read the letter through, not knowing, until it was read, that it was none of his.

"Your letter has made me very sad—but only on account of the pain which this discovery must give you. To me it makes no difference, except that it gives me the chance of showing you that it is for yourself alone that I wish to be to you what you wish me to be. But perhaps even this wouldn't convince you of my disinterestedness, if you knew how certain I am that you are going to make for yourself a name far greater than the name it makes you unhappy to lose.

"What will you think of a woman who shows herself in such a hurry to say 'yes'?"

"How I wish I could say or do anything, Anthony, that would be a comfort or a compensation to you."

When he reached the simple "Elmira" at the foot of this letter, which was, perhaps, in point of feeling, the most genuine she had ever written, Ingestow knew it was not written for him.

"Still the only Tony!" he thought, his own pain and disgust sunk for the moment in the worse and deeper which the knowledge of what she had first written to him would have added to the load Anthony was now enduring. He could not for a moment doubt that this letter would have been posted to his nephew if he had not himself intervened with his offer of marriage. For had not Mary just told him that Miss Corder had refused her son? Was it not then probable that she had told him who it was she had preferred?

As he pondered the difficult position in which he found himself, slipping the sheet he had read slowly back into its fatal envelope, he became aware that Anthony was regarding him curiously.

"My own affairs have made me forget yours, Ingestow," he said. "I am told you are to marry Miss Corder."

Ingestow was thinking so hard that he looked stupid and answered vaguely.

"Oh—ah—yes, of course," he said.

"Is it too soon to wish you happiness?" asked Anthony, ready to defend the woman who had treated him so much worse even than he knew.

Ingestow had made up his mind—not as to his end, for the letter had done that for him—but he had made it up as to the means he would use. His answer, therefore, was clear and prompt.

"Not exactly too soon. It's quite true that Miss Corder has said she will marry me. But there are difficulties. And I haven't yet seen the brother—a newspaper man, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, you see—it's like this. Nothing is to be said till everything is settled. And I shouldn't wonder—I'm a bit anxious, I mean."

"I won't mention it to a soul," said Anthony. "But you've been so good to me and my—my mother, that I just want to tell you I don't grudge you an ounce of your luck. I'm glad you've got what you want."

Long afterwards Lord Ingestow told his sister that, on hearing these words of Anthony's, he had experienced a revolution from Elmira Corder which went far to cure him of his disappointment. But,

"That's all right, old chap," was all he said to Anthony.

Ingestow broke the short silence which followed by asking if he might write a note. It was a short note, written in a few minutes with a firm pen. There were no erasures nor alterations, and Anthony, before he turned away, observed the grim lines into which Ingestow's face settled as he wrote.

When the address was written upon the large envelope he had chosen to enclose the small sheet, Ingestow put it unsealed into his pocket.

"Thanks," he said, rising. "Now, go and get some tea. I know Mary wants you. I'm off. To-morrow at nine, unless you ring me up."

He drove to the nearest office of the District Messengers. On the way he enclosed Elmira's earlier letter to Anthony in that he had just written to her, and sealed the larger envelope.

The same evening, while she was dressing for dinner, this packet was brought to Elmira's room. As many another woman has done, she drew its enclosure from the inner envelope before reading the covering letter.

The bitterness of her double folly seized her with an intensity so cruel that it was some minutes before she was able to read what Ingestow had written. Then, in a sudden flash of hope that her own letter was returned to her unread, she devoured Ingestow's. And her hope died with its first words.

"MY DEAR MISS CORDER," he had written,

"I return you a letter which I must have taken from your writing-table this morning, under the impression that the envelope contained my ticket for Monday night. But for the unfortunate identity of the Christian names I should not, of course, have read it. It was not until I came to the end that I realised my mistake.

"There is only one thing to be done, and it will be better that you should do it. I need scarcely say that no one else knows anything of the enclosed letter.

"Very truly yours,

"INGESTOW."

"DEAR LORD INGESTOW," she wrote in immediate reply,

"Will you release me from the promise which I made you this morning?

"I return you the theatre-tickets, with many and genuine thanks for all your kindness. I am sorry that the fourth ticket was accidentally destroyed.

"Very sincerely yours,

"ELMIRA CORDER."

This letter she contrived before dinner to despatch for special delivery.

Meeting Harriet in the drawing-room,

"Is Sigismund at home?" she asked.

"I don't expect him before midnight," said Harriet.

"You haven't told him what I told you at lunch?" asked Elmira.

"I've had no opportunity," replied Harriet, smiling, "or you may be sure I should."

"Please don't, then. Because I have just written to Lord Ingestow, asking him to let me off."

"But why?" asked Harriet, aghast.

"Because I made a mistake," answered Elmira.

"Is it—is it—" began Harriet, eager to know, but afraid to ask.

"There's nobody else, if that's what you mean," said Elmira bitterly. "They're all quite safe—all the men in England, at least."

Her sister-in-law understood the sarcasm, and felt relief which her kindness of heart enabled her to conceal.

"When is it that Sigismund has to go across?" asked Elmira, towards the end of their dinner.

"About the end of next month," said Sigismund's wife.

"Then I shall go with him, Harriet," said his sister.

"And I guess," she added, with a smile which she tried to

nake more kindly than her smiles for Harriet had lately been, '—I guess he'll have to come home alone."

The history of that day Harriet was not to know. But her theory that Elmira had somehow spoiled two markets, and now retired from the contest herself not unwounded, came nearer the truth than most historical speculations.

CHAPTER VI

LADY MARY SMILES

IT was not only with the marriage of his parents that Anthony's mind was occupied. Yet the difficulties which attended his efforts to get that simple ceremony accomplished at the moment which his somewhat domineering frame of mind had fixed upon as the right, did for a while succeed in pushing his further and more important plans into the background of his thought. Early in the day he had persuaded Bethune, and with his help had procured the needful license. Later he had been interrupted by the letter from Elmira and his meeting with Ingestow. And when at last he had his mother alone, he found his greatest difficulties before him. These, as she presented them to him, were no misplaced hesitations of the maiden; cruel conscience told her with damned iteration at every heart-beat what it was that she was not; told her its cruelties with incision all the deeper for the modesty of the soul which had kept its innocence even better than her body had kept its youth. While he persuaded, coaxed, cajoled, and at last almost commanded, it would run in Anthony's head that here was more purity than could, perhaps, be gathered from a dozen ball-rooms by an angelic bee hunting for this celestial honey.

Her consent won, and that only by an appeal to the disappointment of Bethune if his son's plans should fail by even a day, a new difficulty arose. The Special License was in Anthony's pocket; they could be married early to-morrow by the Registrar here in the house. And then he found that to his mother a marriage without a clergyman and a church was very nearly no marriage at all.

"Will you, if I get the parson and the church," he said at last, "go through it all like a dear, good person, however early and however alarming?"

"Yes, Tony dear," she replied, "I will."

Whereafter Anthony spent, in quest of a clergyman, hours which seemed to his anxiety twice as many as they were. The hunt led him, hansom-borne, from the rectory in Church

t to a pleasant flat in an unpleasant quarter; from flat to lodging-house; from lodging-house to working-men's club; from club to swimming-bath, where the curate that was immediate quarry emerged from the soup-like water certainly no cleaner than he went in. From amidst the other bodies which had added to this decent opacity of the the large curate drew himself up until he stood shamefaced before his hunter. Anthony began to explain his errand, the large curate asked him into his narrow dressing-place, during the early stages of a vigorous toilet, Anthony's was set forth, and the Special License displayed for guarantee. And he discovered that, when the flat had referred to the lodging-house, he had been transferred from the of the parish to the chief curate of the old Parish church; and the change was welcome, for he knew that his own mood would be in better tune with the old, mellow everend bricks of the church on the Embankment, than pseudo-Gothic ugliness of that St Luke's, which rises like a leaded ark from the waste places of Sydney Street.

When they had determined the hour for the ceremony, and on hands upon the interview, Anthony had still to dine with his mother, to visit his father, and, if he could, to find Forsberg again before he slept.

During dinner he became aware that Lady Mary was unhappy because all that day she had not seen Randolph Bethune. It, Anthony imagined her thinking, disapprobation of his hurried and terrific plans that was keeping him away? For a minute, in a silence of their talk, Anthony watched her face; and then,

"No, dear," he said, "it's not that. And he's not ill. I told him, even begged him to come to dinner; but he said he was not going to spoil our *tête-à-tête*; not to-night, he said, of these nights."

Lady Mary smiled at her son.

"If you keep smiling like that, darling," said the boy, "I shall have no regrets."

CHAPTER VII

ANTHONY'S WAY

TO Cheyne Walk that Sunday morning Axel Forsberg brought a great bunch of white roses. In their midst, shielded, pressed upon, but yet not wholly hidden by the soft whiteness of the surrounding petals, was an exquisite adolescent rose of crimson; a rose beginning to forget the bud it had been in the hope of being the flower it was not.

Yet Axel, although he carried flowers of a splendour such as few men in London could in the time have procured, was seized, when once his foot was inside Lady Mary's door, with a shyness to which, since his earliest childhood, he had been a stranger.

Over a certain wide but very flat surface whereon he was accustomed to move about the world, the man knew his ground well; the *above* and the *below* seemed always comfortably negligible. But yesterday Anthony's story and plight had moved him through memory to emotion; and in the continuance of that emotion he had risen to an act of poetry.

But the sight of a common, pretty face, pert beneath the pretty ancillary cap, brought the commonplace back with a rush, and made him afraid. What if Lady Mary should regard his tribute of intelligent devotion in another aspect?

Yesterday morning Axel had guessed, last night he had known, what it was which he was now come westwards so early to see. This mass of sweetness in his hands, properly understood, might bring just one sparkling dew-drop the more of joy to a woman deserving, the good man believed, of all the joys fashioned in the workshops of Heaven. But his emblem, misunderstood or misapplied, would become offence unspeakable.

Under the pert cap was dawning a smile of the kind for which to-day Axel Forsberg might have killed one of his own sex. Fate was playing with his rustier part. His face was flushed with a hotness of hesitation which neither he nor the servant could understand.

He pushed past her into the untenanted library, and laid his flowers there upon the table, dropping his hat beside them.

"I will thank you," he said, "to see that my bouquet is not touched till I require it."

A certain ferocity had mingled itself with his tones, become for the moment truculently nasal. And then, letting the cap-strings flutter after him in a vain struggle for precedence, he hurried down the narrow passage to the studio—the only room of the house which he knew.

There he found no one but Lord Ingestow, who greeted him cordially, avoiding allusion to the character of the ceremony they were to witness together, but plainly by his manner accepting the American as a friend of the family.

Five minutes later Anthony came in. After a few words with Ingestow, he carried Forsberg off with him. As they left the house,

"Mr Bethune is at the church already," he said. "Ingestow will bring Lady Mary."

And Forsberg wondered at the intensity of his own feelings as he watched her enter from the bright sunshine into the cool half-light of the church. His personal acquaintance with Lady Mary was of the slightest; yet, when they left the chancel or the vestry, he told himself that surely no wedding ceremony was ever more solemn, nor touched with a deeper sense of reality than this, where three men attended one middle-aged woman to her marriage, and stood regarding her during the few minutes of the short service with a reverential devotion given perhaps to very few of the brides made in the old church since it was built.

Bethune walked back to her house with his wife. The puzzled curate returned to his lodgings for a pipe before morning service; and the three witnesses went along the Embankment towards 7B Cheyne Walk.

Lady Mary opened the door to them before Anthony could get his key into the lock.

"Come in to breakfast," she said. "Not a wedding one, but a real breakfast of tea, coffee, toast, eggs and devilled kidneys. You dear people must be starving."

She threw open the dining-room door.

"Go in," she said; and when her brother and her son hung back to give precedence to the least familiar, she laid her left hand on Forsberg's arm, and with gentle pattings of her right drove her own two men into the dining-room.

"Mr Forsberg," she said, when Anthony had closed the door upon them, "we haven't met often, have we? And yet

I feel as if I knew you very well. You have seemed to stretch out an arm so long from the great newness of your place—" and she looked up at the height of the man standing over her, "—into the little old-fashionedness of ours with a touch of sympathy so happy for me, that at last I'm sure good men have only one country and one language."

She had not taken her hand from his arm, and therefore found it easy to turn him unresisting into the library.

"You brought those flowers for me, and never gave them—never even sent them up to me," she said.

"I—I—when I got so near to you, Lady Mary," replied Forsberg, "I hadn't the courage. Once across your threshold, they didn't seem good enough."

"That's not very truthful, Mr Forsberg," she answered.

"Why not?" he asked; and then corrected himself: "I mean, how do you know?"

"If a man can get such roses on a Saturday night in May," she replied, "he's a man that knows how good they are."

"They might be the world's best," answered Axel solemnly, "and yet not good enough for you."

"Mr Forsberg," she said, "you have been good to my boy. You have been good to me—partly by chance, and partly on purpose. In what I have been told is the real meaning of the word, you prophesied to yourself at once, without knowing what you were doing, the relation between those two dear men in there who are so wonderfully alike. But for your bringing them together I shouldn't be the dangerously happy woman that you see. I'm keeping them all a few minutes waiting for their coffee, because, if I don't say it now, I shall grow wise and sedate before I have another chance. It wasn't *all* the flowers in your lovely nosegay you were afraid of—it was one flower."

Axel was speechless.

"And that," continued Lady Mary, turning her face from him and preparing refuge at the breakfast-table, "—that one was the best. And I shall never forget your flowers."

She did not, however, take them in to breakfast with the giver. But when the meal was half over she asked Forsberg to ring the bell. And when she told the summoned parlour-maid to take the roses from the library and to put them in water in the boudoir, she raised her eyes to those of the American Swede with a glance that made him glad at heart that he had played the meddler.

When they rose from table, Ingestow began to say good-bye, but his sister begged him to stay with them at least until lunch.

"Lunch!" he cried. "I sha'n't be fit for another meal till this time to-morrow."

"It's only eleven," said Mary, with entreaty in eyes and voice. And he wondered what more was coming.

The day was warm, and threatened greater heat as it grew older. Two nights before the air had been chilly with rain, but now London blazed like the face of a child so full of new goodness that he cannot believe he has ever been naughty.

Lady Mary said that the gown she had worn to church and through breakfast was too heavy, and went upstairs. A few minutes later the four men found themselves smoking in the little garden and wondering what there was to talk about. Forsberg soon left them, Anthony going to the door with him.

Finding himself thus alone with his suddenly made brother-in-law, Ingestow, being afraid, and being also a Frozier, tried to take the bull by the horns.

"Mr Bethune," he began, "it might be years before we found another chance like this. I've got to say something about things, you know. But I'd much rather talk of Christian Science or the German Emperor."

"I should prefer," said Bethune, "to hear what is in your mind about me, Lord Ingestow."

In spite of his joy, belated and undeserved, he was hardly happy. The last three hours had strung him to an agony of endurance, of which as yet he did not see the end.

Ingestow looked at the worn man who seemed to have all the life of him concentrated in his eyes. Now the vitality of Lord Ingestow was diffused very equably over his person and faculties; which was perhaps the reason why his gaze fell before that of the culprit he felt it incumbent on him to judge; or, if judgment were no longer possible after the countenance he had this morning given to the morning's work, he ought at least to show, he thought, that of judgment he was capable. Otherwise, what was the good of being the head of a great house—what was the good of having elderly half-sisters?

And yet he could not meet his victim's eyes; and was annoyed because the man somehow overpowered him.

"You are a man of distinction, Mr Bethune," he said; "a man I should be proud to let my sister marry. But this is

a very dreadful affair for me. It's only for that nephew of mine—and for the woman that's his mother and my sister, that I have taken a hand in this. It's all most peculiarly damned awkward, you know."

"I have known the awkwardness—and myself—and Lady Mary," said Bethune, his face slowly whitening under his restraint, "for a great many years."

The words left so much to Ingestow, that his honesty drove him to compunction.

"And I," he said, "have neglected her utterly till a few weeks ago. I haven't—God forgive me—even known her—much less suffered for her. Mr Bethune, that was my last word. We shall be friends if my sister is happy."

"Then friends we shall be," answered Bethune, with gravity absolute.

As if to prove his words they saw Mary coming to them over the grass. She had put on a gown cut with extreme skill, in flowing lines exquisitely responsive to the beauty of the figure within. The material was a soft, shining *mousseline de soie*, of a grey colour changing its shades like plumage as she moved.

With a touch of something like coquetry added to her constant charm of bearing and expression, she came to her brother and husband. For upstairs, two minutes ago, in the light of a long mirror, she had recovered the lost key to the vanity of which she had made no use in her youth. And now, for the first time in her life, she approached a man with definite intent of conquest. This purpose, long as superfluous as it was now become legitimate, she began at once to carry out, trampling, as it were, upon the slain. For a time she so fascinated her husband, and charmed as well as amused her brother, with her beauty and a certain fresh and unexpected humour in her face as well as in her words, that when Anthony interrupted their laughter by taking his father into the worm-eaten summer-house, Bethune looked like a man wakened from a dream.

"Bother that boy of yours!" said Ingestow. "You'll have to cure him of spoiling sport. But, I say! I don't half know you yet, Mary. I've never seen you like this before."

"I've never been like this before, Ingestow."

"As for your husband," he continued, smiling to see her colour rise like a flag to salute the new word, "it was no better than hitting a man when he's down."

His sister smiled in response; then she looked across the

lawn at the grave faces of the two men talking over the table in the summer-house.

"Perhaps I've no right to be happy," she said. "But I can't help it. It's for the first time, Ingestow."

"My last word in the whole matter, Mary," he answered, "is this: you've got to be happy. If you aren't, I shall feel myself responsible and make myself unpleasant, as responsible people always do."

The father and son passed them, going into the house.

"Will you come in with us, dear?" said Anthony. And Lady Mary followed him, Ingestow keeping his place at her side.

"Anyhow," he said, "Anthony finds himself responsible." And went with her into the studio.

Bethune was sitting on the couch, and Mary, going over to him, checked his attempt to rise, sitting beside him with a hand upon his arm that seemed to protect him from dangers expected rather than known. With his back towards the door of the boudoir through which they had entered, stood Anthony, looking at a picture he knew but did not see, and arranging for the fiftieth time the slippery order of the things which he had to get from his own into two other minds. For, till Ingestow spoke, he did not know there was a third.

"You don't mind my cigar, Mary?" he asked.

And Anthony turned to see his uncle standing in the doorway of the smaller room. At the sight there went through him a hot surge of annoyance at the ready use of his mother's name by the brother who had known her for a few weeks only, and seemed now in the general conspiracy to push him out of his place in her house. He knew he was unjust, and it made him for the moment angrier to know his own unreason.

"Not a bit, Ingestow," answered his sister.

"I mean, if you people want me here. You asked me not to go," he explained, "and I suppose that what's coming is what I was to stay for."

"I think you'd better stay," said Anthony, as if afraid to let control slip from his hands.

Ingestow looked as if he had not heard. He made a small, circular gesture with his half-smoked cigar.

"Shall I finish it here or in the garden?" he asked, with his eyes steady on Lady Mary.

"Here, please," she replied.

And her brother, as if he would protect her even as she

seemed ready to shield her husband, took the third seat upon the couch. He felt himself one in a line of three culprits, seated in a row like a bench of mischievous schoolboys. What was it that this prig of an Anthony held ready to hurl at them? He remembered the days when he used to try to make bets with himself as to which of his sins it was that had been discovered.

He was afraid he would laugh, if Anthony did not begin soon.

"Get it off your chest, old man," he said kindly.

"I want to know," said Anthony, "what we're going to tell them about it."

"That means," said Ingestow, "that you know what you want them to be told."

"It does—just that," cried Anthony. "What the world ought to be told, what it is best for me, best for my father and mother, and even best for you that the world should be told, are the same thing."

Mary knew her son, and knew, with a shudder, what he meant. His father suspected his meaning. Ingestow raised eyebrows of inquiry, and Anthony answered the eyebrows.

"I mean," he said, "that we'll tell 'em the truth. We've just got to tell it. Oh, don't stop me now to ask how—that's easy. I know how well enough. But you've all got to say yes to the telling of it. I can't stand the thing any other way."

"I don't want to be a nuisance," said Ingestow, speaking with much gravity. "And I'll hold my tongue when I've said this. Why, my dear boy, should you bother these good people to-day? Your mother has been through enough for one time. Your father isn't too fit. Let 'em go to Baden for the rest of the summer, while things slide, and settle it all when they come back, and you've worked off some of the steam on the new storage-battery and the motors."

Mary lifted a half glance of concurrence at her brother. And then her son knew that he must fight for her as well as for himself.

"It's my misfortune as well as my luck, Ingestow," he said, "that fighting for my own hand is fighting for theirs too. You are most likely right in thinking that it is myself I think of first just now. But when I've done, you'll say that I've made it plain that what's good for me is good for them."

To this Ingestow's answer was the only answer possible.

He was as silent as the two who sat beside him. The three held their tongues, as good men and women must, while they listen to the tale of him in whose wrongs they have a part.

"I'll begin with the little things. Little reasons are only weak when they come after the bigger, showing that the biggest aren't big enough. Let them go to Baden, Japan, New Zealand or California, my mother and father will never get away from the thought of 'what will people think while we are away—when we come back—when they see us with the man they call Anthony Le Dane—the man that is so like the other man his aunt has married?' Have not some of them already fastened the guilt of my existence upon the woman without children whom they have been told was my mother? The family—now I am speaking to you, Ingestow—the family won't suffer by the exchange of one sister's guilt for the other's recklessness. And things went too far before I knew, for them to see Thibet Bethune without seeing the Mr Le Dane that plays at making motor-cars. Seven or eight years ago, if I'd been told, I could have been sent to Valparaiso, Honolulu, or Hong-kong. But now it's just this—if we switch on to us the search-light—if we let 'em see us as we are, and let them apportion according to their various silliness, our shares of blame—our shades of ostracism, we shall know from that moment the worst; we shall never need afterwards any concealment; we shall go our own way, in their sunshine or twilight; we shall do our own work and belong to each other.

"If we try to keep up the fictions—the decent appearances—but you want to say something, Ingestow."

"I do. Only this: why can't you let them go away and forget it all now, and make up your mind about these heroic measures when they come back? You can never tell how people are going to take things, and perhaps you'll find a month hence that there's no need to tell them anything at all."

Ingestow knew that his words were as weak as the advice they offered. But so close did he sit to his sister that he felt her trembling, and he had seized upon the first hope of even temporary escape for her.

"Because," cried Anthony, "the marriage will be in all the papers to-morrow morning. That was necessary anyhow. If we do what I wish now, to-day, all questions are answered in the very moment of asking. We shall have the credit of our courage. If we leave it alone, the sneaking, whispering and

lying will go on. There's one man at least that will see we aren't forgotten."

Then he turned to Lady Mary, and spoke as if they two were alone.

"Look here, mother, I love you with all my soul. When you told me you were that, you seemed to put a crown on my head, in spite of the silly, sulky pain it gave me in the place where my other kind of pride lives. To me you are good all through. You do good to all you touch, and wrong no one."

"You, Tony," she interrupted; "I have wronged you."

"You've made me the proudest man in the world—but one," declared Anthony with heat.

"Who is the one, Tony?" she asked.

"The man that I shall be," he answered, "when you do what I know is the plain, honest thing to be done—when you let me, I mean, get it done for you—for me—for my father.

"But you will do me wrong, if you force me to call you mother in secret—if I'm to be afraid to meet you with my father in public, for fear men should see what a good many have seen already. What they call society can't hurt you, for you've ignored its existence ever since I can remember. The friends you have may indeed get sifted. But that's a good thing in itself. You don't visit, so you risk no impertinence. It's for them to stay away, if they want. I know, dear, it's a sacrifice I'm asking of you. But it's a sacrifice that the world will force upon you in a worse shape, if it isn't made now, all at once, instead of in dribblets. Even if I were to go right away from you both, and stay away, you'd never feel or be safe. You'd be haunted by it against your will, wondering always with every woman you met, how much she knew, how much she might guess. But you don't want me to go away, do you, mother?"

Lady Mary had some difficulty in speaking.

"You know I don't," she whispered. "But do you think people will—will take so much interest in us?"

"I know they will. You and my father are both people of note. They'll be interested in the marriage, and in the rest, as they pick it up, one point after another—unless you take my way of it, and let them hear it all in a lump. Kill their appetite with a bellyful, and they'll soon stop ruminating, and crawl away to see if they can't find a meal with more pepper in it somewhere else. There are three brands of human cattle, dear, in the world. They shade into each other, of course—

perhaps I had better say there are three main qualities spread unevenly over men—goodness, badness, and silliness.”

“Two only,” said Bethune quietly. “Goodness and wisdom—negatives aren’t qualities.”

“Of course—that’s right,” said Anthony; and the pedantic interruption seemed to cheer, rather than disconcert him. “I say, then, let’s throw them our story like a bone to worry. Let the wicked gloat; let the good pardon, or walk by on the other side, according to the stamp of their virtue; let the silly laugh and the wise understand; let us go on our journey without fearing anything more.

“I can stand being illegitimate; but what I can’t stand is going about pretending I’m not. I could stand being cut, but I couldn’t stand having my hand taken by a hand that might push me away if the man knew me for what I was too cowardly to tell him I was.

“I saw a little boy running after a woman yesterday. He called her ‘Mums’. I have never done that. I should like to come and live at home with—with you two, and call my mother *Mums* whenever I felt inclined.”

His last words were spoken with some emotion. Suddenly he caught sight of Ingestow’s grey eyes fixed upon him with an interest which suggested criticism. Whether or not there goes along with primal sin a corresponding sense of original guilt, it is very sure that with most men to expect judgment is to look for condemnation. So Anthony stiffened.

“I beg your pardon, Ingestow,” he said. “I was thinking we were alone.”

“Shut up,” said Ingestow. “I mean, go on.”

Whereupon Anthony paid his uncle the compliment of forgetting him again.

Mary also had forgotten Ingestow, and had slipped to her knees beside her husband, sobbing, with her face in her hands. She was weeping for the little boy that was not—for the child that had called her by no pet names of motherhood.

Anthony was not wise enough to divine the cause of her tears; but in the glance of inquiry he cast upon her he saw Bethune’s hand laid upon her head. And he saw the trembling reverence of the man’s fingers before they settled upon the hair that was still as beautiful as a girl’s. Love begets love, and he thought ever after that his for his father began in that moment. But there were two who knew better.

“You can give me all that—you can give me more than

the luck of things has taken from me," he said in conclusion, "if you'll do what I want you to do. There's only one way out of this for us—the way through. If you'll both come with me, you'll never have a moment's regret. Take any other road, and you'll have nothing else. I am yours, sir, anyhow. I am yours, mother, whatever happens. But, if you both want to be twice mine, let's face the music."

"I think," said Bethune, when he was sure none else was ready to speak, "—I think, Mary, we should take our wisdom from the mouth of the babe."

She lifted her head and stretched a hand to her son.

As he stooped over and kissed her,

"Yes, Tony," she whispered; and, rising slowly, sat again upon the couch.

From the couch Ingestow rose, and looked awkwardly about for some receptacle for the stump of his cigar. When he had found it, he began without apology to light a cigarette.

"Being already in a minority spoils the value of one's suffrage," he said at last. "But there's no shadow of doubt that the only Anthony is right."

"Having been originally in opposition, I can only hope for the modern kudos of the turncoat. Like the mover of the resolution, I find it best for myself to support his policy."

Anthony looked at his watch. Then he put an arm round his mother, speaking to her softly as he led her to the door. Before closing it behind her, he stood a moment at the top of the five steps, listening. And the two men below heard the sound of a hansom cab suddenly checked.

Ingestow approached the stair.

"When are you going to do it, Tony?" he asked.

"In five minutes," said Anthony; and closed the door.

"But how? You can't advertise on Sunday."

"Yes, I can," replied Anthony, coming down to him. "But I know a better way than the press."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVERTISEMENT

BEFORE he could explain further—if, indeed, he had intended to throw further light upon his methods—the door opened once more, and the parlour-maid entered. Anthony took the card from the tray she carried, and read the few words pencilled upon it.

"Very well," he said. "When I ring, show the two gentlemen in here—not before. Go and tell Lady Mary that I shall be obliged if she will join us as soon as possible."

But Lady Mary passed the girl on the way; and when she came down the steps to them, Anthony saw that she had succeeded in removing the signs of her recent tears. For a minute or so he spoke to her in an earnest undertone; when he had done, she was pale and rigid.

"It ought not to last more than five minutes," he said in conclusion. "And then we need never speak of the matter again."

He pressed the button of the bell.

"Won't you sit down, mother?" he asked.

"I prefer standing," she replied.

Once more the door was opened.

"Mr Beldover—Mr Forsberg," said the maid, and disappeared.

"Go down," said Forsberg; and Beldover, with a countenance in which indignation, fear and curiosity were blended greatly to the disadvantage of his dignity, descended the steps.

Bethune rose to his feet. The others stood already.

"Do you want me here?" asked Forsberg.

"If you please," said Anthony.

And then for a moment he looked at the stranger with scrutiny almost intolerable.

Beldover would have spoken, but Anthony prevented him.

"Please be quiet," he said. "I have had you brought here to listen. You cannot fail to be interested by the information I shall give you. For I know you have been lately busied

with researches into my family history. I am going to spare you further trouble."

There was a slight pause, which Beldover was not this time anxious to break.

Then, turning towards her,

"This is Lady Mary Bethune," said Anthony—and interrupted himself; for Beldover had made a small, probably automatic movement.

"Please be careful," said Anthony, sharply. "You are not being introduced. I am merely giving instruction. This is Lady Mary Bethune. She was Lady Mary Frozier. Lady Mary is my mother. And this," he went on, "is Mr Randolph Bethune. Mr Bethune is my father. Lady Mary and Mr Bethune were married this morning.

"You have their authority, and also Lord Ingestow's authority, to repeat these facts. You have my commands to repeat them. It is only upon the understanding that they are to be repeated by you that I spare you the treatment you have deserved."

Beldover could not speak. He did not even wish for the power to speak, but glanced, helpless and furtive, at the faces of the three silent ones, whom he vaguely feared more than the man who spoke.

Then his gaze crept over his shoulder to the door, where it met the eye of his fifth judge.

"Mr Forsberg," said Anthony, "I shall be obliged if you will see Mr Beldover safely out of the house."

Axel flung the door wide, let Beldover pass him, and followed him through the house and out of it. The cab which had brought them was waiting. When his victim was in it, Forsberg gave the driver money, and returned to the house.

He was struck with a shyness that made it impossible for him to go back at once to the studio. He found the other door into the garden—and in the garden, Ingestow.

In silence his lordship offered tobacco. In tacit sympathy the two men walked up and down Lady Mary's grass-plot many times.

"Silence," said Lord Ingestow at last, "is supposed to be very antiseptic. But I have my doubts of its doing us any good, Mr Forsberg; though perhaps I oughtn't to breathe them so near to Cheyne Row. Our first meeting was pretty queer; but our latest has been damned awful. So please say it."

"What?" asked Forsberg.

"Whatever's in your mind, and wants to get out. There must be something. And the awfulness I mentioned has made me trust you, Mr Forsberg, and—well, you understand."

Forsberg smiled, well pleased.

"If I have your permission, then," he said, "I should like to know—you see, I've been worrying some about Lady Mary—and I want to know how the boy did it."

This request may have been more intimate than Ingestow liked, even in response to his very open invitation. But he not only perceived that he had brought it upon himself, but recognised the spirit in which it was made.

"Oh, the boy was great," he answered, frankly. "He convinced us—me against my will. And he hadn't a reproach in the whole harangue. There was nothing to give pain but the facts, and hearing them spoken of. I'd bet my sister is happier now than she was in church this morning. But Anthony! Good God, man, what an egoist!"

"No more than he ought to be, I guess, at his age, and with his powers and his future. If you'd said he was built for a despot, I'd have agreed."

"H'm!" murmured the other. "Well, you must know him better than I can. But of course," he added apologetically, "—of course I'm sorry for the poor chap."

"When I was in short pants," said Forsberg, "I lost a lime on my way to school. Hunting the gutter for it on the way home, I found a ten-dollar bill. I didn't grizzle over the ten cents, Lord Ingestow. And my ten dollars didn't last long; Anthony can't spend his find."

Ingestow laughed sympathetically, and asked how his companion had managed to kidnap Beldover.

"Found him at the club," said Forsberg. "Trouble was to get him outside. Asked him if he knew you. He said no. Asked if he wanted to know you. His face said yes for him. Offered to take him there and then to meet you. Said you wanted to meet him. Followed me like a lamb. When we were in the street, he seemed to get suspicious, and asked if it was you only. I said there were others—Le Dane for one. He saw the plant, guessed it had to do with the beastliness he'd been talking, and tried to get back into the club. I just let him feel my fingers on his arm, and told him if he didn't come whole, I'd take the pieces when I'd done with him. The little devil was sick with fear, so I gave him my word he shouldn't be hurt. You know the rest."

"I wonder," said Ingestow, "what he'll do next."

"Look for his revenge," said Forsberg.

"The only way for him to get it," said Ingestow, "is to hold his tongue."

"Not Beldover—not even if he could ultimately baulk Anthony by his silence. That he knows he can't do, so he won't miss his chance to be first with the story. Among his crowd, you see," explained Forsberg, "he'll be able to show he was more than half right."

"Then he'll dress the tale up," said Ingestow; "give it some damned colouring of his own."

"He'll keep pretty close to his text, I believe," replied Forsberg. "He's sure to tell the story of how he learned it, as well as what he learned. When all our names are out, he'll be afraid to add much of his own."

Lord Ingestow glanced at the mighty person of the man beside him.

"I dare say he will be afraid," he said.

It was late in the afternoon when the three younger men left Cheyne Walk, going westward. Ingestow stopped a hansom. Before he entered it,

"If you two have nothing better to do to-morrow night," he said, "you might come with me to see Coquelin. I have three stalls."

His invitation accepted, Lord Ingestow added:

"And that reminds me, Tony, that I ought to tell you that you were premature with your congratulations yesterday."

"I don't quite understand—" Anthony began.

"It's off—most definitely and completely off," said the other, speaking, Anthony thought, with unnecessary sharpness. "So am I."

He got into the cab; then leaned from it for a last word.

"I'd like to tell you all about it, old fellow," he said, as Anthony drew near while Forsberg walked slowly on. "But I'm not at liberty. Miss Corder has changed her mind—that's all."

On the shaded lawn of the little garden the lovers sat and talked that Sunday evening till the sun went down and after. There were twenty-four years, Mary said, to be filled up; and she would have followed him forthwith all over the world. But a phrase which Bethune used for the second time diverted their talk from his travels.

"I do wish," she said, "that you had not persisted in believing it all your fault."

"It was," he answered.

"It was mine, dear, no less."

"You did not know," said Bethune.

"I knew enough to protect me. But I was afraid of losing you, and I—"

She could not go on. Nor would Bethune let her, when again she tried.

"Let us each stick to his own past guilt, then," he said, "and try to forget it in the present."

"No—not that," she cried earnestly. "We'll change about. I shall tell myself the fault was yours. You must teach yourself that it was mine. And then we can forgive each other, my dear, what we might never forgive to ourselves."

And so, for the first time and the last, they forgave.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE ROAD

ON the Monday morning a summons came to Lord Ingestow from the Dowager Countess. She must see him before he went out.

When she did see him, she brandished the *Morning Post* in his face.

"What does this mean?" she cried.

"Tory politics," said her son. "Quite contrary to the family tradition."

"Tory Fiddlesticks!" screamed his mother. "This marriage—here—yesterday—" and she slapped the newspaper vaguely and fiercely with three fingers—"is this traditional?—to marry strange travellers—without warning—on a Sunday?"

Ingestow told her the facts, briefly and without sentiment, but with full loyalty to those he had yesterday befriended.

Lady Ingestow had eaten her breakfast in bed, and her son expected to see her leap from it in the excitement of hearing his story, which, for the first time in his experience, she failed to interrupt.

Seeing that she restrained herself to listen, he looked for an explosion of virtuous indignation when he should come to an end.

Explosion came, indeed, but not of the kind he had expected.

"There—there! I knew it," she cried.

"Knew what?" asked her son.

"I knew that woman never had a child. She couldn't. Well," she continued, glowing with satisfaction in her belated triumph over poor Blanche Le Dane, "if he's not *her* son, I daresay he's a very good sort of young man—and so clever, they say. And it's not his fault, how he was born, is it? I must see what can be done, Ingestow."

"He won't thank you."

"Nobody ever does," said the woman. "But he'll be glad to be asked out where he's never been asked before, just when he's expecting to be dropped by the rest. And he'll be

pleased to get his motor-cars sold—and I'll sell 'em for him, see if I don't, just because that awful woman wasn't his mother."

Ingestow laughed.

"You only achieved me for your score," he said, "and you wouldn't forgive her for presuming to equal it. Was that why you hated her?"

"No," answered his mother, her exultation producing unconsidered frankness; "it was because I hated her already."

With flushed cheeks and tremulous chin, she read the notice of the wedding once again.

"As for poor Lady Mary," she said, "it's a romance. Properly handled, the story might make her the fashion. I believe it might be done. Lady Cantire would help me, and she's—"

Ingestow had had enough.

"Lady Cantire thinks herself an expert at social rehabilitation, doesn't she?" he said, with a sneer. "She's been through the mill herself, and, if she can come out of it uncrushed, she thinks anyone can. I think her a shameless and disgusting person. Now, look here, mater: my sister Mary's a forgiving woman; if you want to call on her, it's just possible she might consent to see you. But if you talk to her as you've talked to me, she'll never let you inside her doors a second time. Now don't say I didn't warn you."

And Lady Ingestow wondered why he was angry. For herself, she felt in charity with all men.

On a Sunday afternoon three weeks after the wedding at Chelsea Old Church, Anthony found himself walking down the Bayswater Road.

Hard work had done him good, as well as left him tired. The greenness of the Park attracted him; and, though at Victoria Gate he had resisted the temptation, at Lancaster Gate he yielded and turned into the Gardens.

The heat drove him in search of the deepest shade; and the shadow, when he found it, was spotted and meagre. He seated himself as well as he could, however, and managed to enjoy his position and his thoughts.

He had in his pocket Lady Mary's latest letter, the last of many. But he knew its words too well to take it out. He thought of her, of her happiness, and of the simplicity, humour and reserve which made what he read like the letters he

imagined a very clever and sweet-minded girl might on her honeymoon have written to her mother. A passage there would be here and there, of course, where the attitude was reversed. One such in this last had touched him as if in a new place; speaking of his father, she had written, in spite of the reserve which was here the woman's rather than the girl's, a criticism which was a panegyric—and contained, their son at least made no doubt, nothing beyond the truth. And between the lines he read the mother's unwritten appeal: "Whatever wrong I have done you, O my son, I have in your father given you a possession of price."

Well, anyhow, if she were happy, he reflected, it was not without help of her son.

And here his thought fetched from him a low laugh of satisfaction.

"They're worth so much more than a penny, that I'm sure I can't afford to buy them," said a voice behind him. "But I do wish you'd give, or at least lend me your thoughts."

Anthony spoke as he rose and turned.

"They're not for publication, Mrs Corder," he said. "Which is a pity, because they were really very good ones."

Harriet came round and sat upon his bench.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" she asked, as Anthony dropped back into his seat.

"There are two reasons," he answered. "You know one of them, at least."

"And I shouldn't wonder," replied Mrs Corder, "if I guess the other. But we'll begin with the reason I'm supposed to know. Sigismund brought it to me from his club."

"Then you know why I didn't come."

"I don't," said Harriet, "unless you're quite silly."

"I waited to be asked," said Anthony.

"Do you know what Sigismund said—I mean, do you want to know?"

"Yes," he replied.

Harriet Corder glanced sideways at him, as if not sure of her courage.

"Well, of course I chattered like a chimpanzee when I heard it. So when my husband was getting sleepy, he closed the discussion: 'Even at the price,' he said, 'I'd rather a hundred times have Bethune than any respectable old colonel that nobody remembers.'"

Anthony lifted his spotless hat a fraction of an inch. The

day was warm, and he might have done it for comfort. But Harriet interpreted the movement as a salute.

"What was that other reason why you didn't come?" she asked.

"Elmira refused to marry me," said Anthony calmly. "So it was only polite, apart from the other thing, to wait a week or two before calling."

Now Harriet heard this for the first time. And she was angry with Elmira—for the moment almost as angry as she would have been had Elmira married him.

"She got well paid out for it, then," she said viciously, putting things together in her mind.

Anthony turned and looked at her.

"I sha'n't pretend not to understand you," he said. "But you are quite mistaken. Ingestow himself told me it was her doing."

Harriet, in spite of her ignorance of the facts, had seen further into Elmira's mind than even Elmira would have thought possible. And she perceived at once that ignorance was Anthony's safety. So she held her tongue.

"The fact is," he continued, "you don't like her and can't be fair to her."

"She's going back to America," said Mrs Corder.

"When?"

"Next Wednesday—with Sigismund."

"I'd like to say good-bye to her. When shall I come?"

With so much coolness did he speak, that Harriet's fears sank almost to rest.

"Say it now," she replied. "She's waiting for me, on a seat behind that big tree."

Anthony rose.

"I'll stay here," she added, smiling, "till it's said."

To approach her from the front, he went round a little. Elmira, when she saw him coming, had a small throb of hope; but when he drew near and she saw his face, she knew it was her last.

"I hear you are going back to America," he said, when they had shaken hands.

"Yes—very soon," said Elmira. "I'm so glad to see you before I go. Do sit down."

As he talked for the first few minutes of things unimportant, Anthony was surprised by the equanimity with which he endured her presence and her beauty. Since the day he had

received her letter, he had known that he had mistaken the strength of his feeling for her; for he had found that thoughts of his mother's happiness, of his own altered condition, or even of his business enterprises had at any time the power to put Elmira out of his mind. He had, however, expected, upon meeting her again, some revival of the sensations with which he had parted from her. But, though his admiration of her person was undiminished, he found his heart quite unmoved—a discovery which gave him a sense of humiliation as well as of relief.

"I have so much wished to see you before I go," said Elmira at last, "because I wanted once more to beg you to believe—we have been such good friends, you know, that I couldn't bear for you not to believe it—to believe that my saying no to you had nothing to do with what you told me in your letter—about yourself, I mean."

"I believe," answered Anthony, "that you refused me, not my birth. But you had a right to refuse either."

"That's nice of you," said Elmira. "There were some other things I wanted to ask you," she added, hesitating.

"Please do," responded Anthony.

Elmira began with the things which were easiest and least important.

"You're not—not very unhappy, are you?" she asked. And he knew that she referred to the irregularity of his birth.

He did not take offence, though he wished she had asked him any other question. But not only had he called the tune—not only had he insisted upon declaring the facts of his birth—not only had he sworn to face the music he himself had set going; he was also obliged to admit that Elmira had asked her question in a tone and spirit of genuine, even tender sympathy.

"No," he declared stoutly, "I'm not unhappy. In some ways I'm happier than I ever was before."

"Lady Mary is out of town, isn't she? I would like to have seen her before I went."

"She's in Cornwall, with my father," said Anthony. It was not the first time; yet he felt better when it was said.

"And business—your business, Anthony? Is the storage-battery going to do all you hoped?"

"I think it is," he replied; and told her something of the advance in his affairs since he had last seen her.

"And the big pile?" asked Elmira.

"It'll come in time—if we can keep ahead of the other inventors long enough."

"And, since this is the last time I shall see you—at least for a very long time," she said, "won't you tell me the secret of what you're going to do with it when you have it?"

Anthony laughed and shook his head.

"It's philanthropy, isn't it?"

"I hate that beastly word. Well, anyhow, it'll be rather a new kind. I mean," he explained, "that, if I get my chance, I'm not going to spend life and money in palliating misery. I won't prop, I'll build. There," he said, with a smile, "that's all—and more than I've said to anyone else."

"Thank you," said Elmira; and then, with a lower and softened voice: "I'd be sorrier to hurt you, Anthony, than anyone else I know. I do hope I didn't—not much, I mean."

She had no expectation. Since she had understood fully her love for him, she had also understood what he had called his for her. But she wished, if she could, to find out how he had come to understand it himself.

"Of course your letter hit me pretty hard," Anthony answered. "But, though I was conceited enough to be surprised, I quite understood."

He paused, hesitating for a moment.

"Since you have said that about being friends," he went on, his mind made up, "I want to tell you something. A lot of things have happened to me lately. People in books, and some out of them, say that makes a man feel old. Well, it's had just the opposite effect on me. I feel as if I'd jumped seven years backwards—as if I were a child again. It only means, of course, that I've found out in a hurry that there are a lot of things in the world which, from being used to talk and read of them, I had got to think I knew something about; while all the time I've been quite ignorant of them."

Again he paused, and Elmira encouraged him with an interrogative "Yes?"

"You see," he continued, "I thought you the most beautiful thing on earth. I do think you the most beautiful girl on earth. I thought I was in love with you—you knew that?"

"I knew you thought so," said Elmira; "and I knew you weren't."

"You're so wonderful," said Anthony, filling his eyes with her beauty, "that I wish I hadn't found out that I wasn't."

Some women," he went on, " would think me a beast for saying that. But you won't, I know."

Elmira greeted this ingenuous confidence with a faint smile.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Because you said a little while ago that you hoped you hadn't hurt me."

"Then that's all right," said Elmira, with an effort at gaiety which served its purpose.

"There's a thing that puzzles me—not from mere curiosity," said Anthony.

"Be curious, then," answered Elmira.

"It's Ingestow. I want to know if—if he treated you—"

"Yes, indeed," she answered. "Lord Ingestow treated me absolutely well. He was generous and considerate. It was I that didn't play the game."

"He told me," said Anthony, "that you changed your mind."

"Yes," said Elmira. "But that's not exactly what I meant."

For a while she seemed to reflect, and then added:

"I'll tell you all about it, if you like. But I'd rather not."

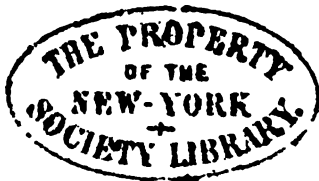
"Then don't," he replied; and a few minutes later rose to bid her good-bye.

She held his hand for a moment in hers, from which she had drawn the glove.

"Tell me one thing more, Anthony," she pleaded, looking up at him in a way which he did not understand. "How was it that you found out that—that you didn't?"

Uncomfortable as her eyes and her question made him, Anthony told her the truth.

"You see," he answered in a low voice. "I've been looking on at the real thing."



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